

# A RASHID SHAZ READER



# ISLAM

## ANOTHER CHANCE?

*'a new Muslim mind is the minimum to start with'*

**Rashid Shaz**



*Here is the real message of Islam which came as a mercy to humanity and a light to shine....*

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*This is an extraordinary book emerging from a foremost Muslim thinker concerning contemporary Islam in relation to our complex human situation. It is an illuminating book for non-Muslims and, in my view, is a truly essential book for Muslim readers. With all my heart, I hope that this book succeeds in bringing a unified Islam back to its foundational message that our world needs so badly: the direct, unmediated meeting of God and man.*

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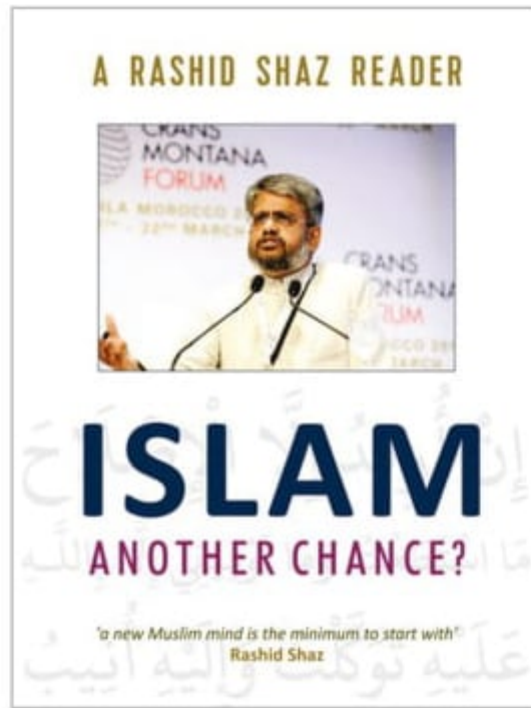
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Islam, with its varying shades – Sunni, Shia, Ibadi or Ismaili, is not what most of its adherents believe in today. Over the centuries of Muslim rule, the message of Islam has gone through a radical transformation.

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*'The reader who moves through the text, chapter by chapter, will be presented with a forensic dissection of the malaise which has brought the ummah to the state in which it finds itself today. S/he may well come near to the point of despair when s/he reflects on what Muslims have done to the mighty message for mankind entrusted by God to His last Prophet. The remedy offered for its revitalization some might find shocking and iconoclastic, but others may argue it is the only one that, in spite of the growing clamour over recent centuries for islah, has not yet been tried. It might even be the one that succeeds...'*

*(from the Editor's Preface)*



Greatly revered for his reform writings on Islam, Rashid Shaz is an ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador, Chairman of the New Delhi based **Peace India International**, and a professor at the Aligarh Muslim university, India.

***Some of his important works include:***

**Islam:** Negotiating the Future

**Creating a Future Islamic Civilizations**

**Understanding the Muslim Malaise**

**Idrak Asbab Zawale Ummat**

(2 vols. Urdu)

**Kitabul Urooj**

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(Urdu)

**Lastampokh**

(A travelogue on Istanbul's Sufi underworld)

**Kodra**

(A travelogue on Shia-Sunni Understanding)

**Manifesto of the United Islam**

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**[www.RashidShaz.com](http://www.RashidShaz.com)**

# Islam: Another Chance?

*A Rashid Shaz Reader*



# Islam

## Another Chance?

A RASHID SHAZ READER

*Edited and Prefaced by*  
Geoffrey Nash

*With a foreword by*  
Glen T. Martin

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*'Those eager to make a new beginning must accept beforehand that the traditional mind will lead them to nowhere. A new Muslim mind is the minimum to start with. Without reactivating our brains, we will surely fall short of realising in full the nature and magnitude of our malaise.'*

## Editor's Preface

This volume of writings by renowned scholar Professor Rashid Shaz is a collection of pieces all originally composed in Urdu; some have appeared before in English translation but the larger portion have not. New English translations have now been added and earlier ones revised and improved without sacrificing the polemical force or diminishing the contexts out of which the original Urdu writings were conceived. Great language and promoter of Islamic debate that Urdu is, it is timely that Professor Shaz's thought should reach wider audiences who do not read Urdu but which the English language can deliver.

This is not so much a collection of essays as one strong and coherently constructed argument which emerges cumulatively as each chapter progresses. The nub of it is to be found in the penultimate chapter, but it is much enriched by the sweep of Professor Shaz's scholarly knowledge of Muslim authors and their writings from the earliest days of the ummah to the present, which both teaches and enlarges our understanding at each stage.

The intended audience for this volume is primarily a Muslim one; the argument does not aim to impress sophisticated others and there is no modish gesturing toward groups of outside cogniscenti. One of its major implications is that the movements to which western commentators have appended the qualifier 'radical' do not merit that accolade at all because they by no means penetrate to the *root* of the ummah's predicament. Rather than drawing on dubious sources of western totalitarian political thought, or for that matter, modern theoretical trends, the origin and inspiration of the ideas here presented is not exterior to Islam, but arises from the one source around which all Muslims can unite - the Qur'an.

The method adopted is rational, analytical, and shaped by Qur'anic evidence. The reader who moves through the text, chapter by chapter, will be presented with a forensic dissection of the malaise which has brought the ummah to the state in which it finds itself today. S/he may well come near to the point of despair when s/he reflects



on what Muslims have done to the mighty message for mankind entrusted by God to His last Prophet. The remedy offered for its revitalization some might find shocking and iconoclastic, but others may argue it is the only one that, in spite of the growing clamour over recent centuries for islah, has not yet been tried. It might even be the one that succeeds...

Geoffrey Nash

London

# Foreword

It is my great honor to write a foreword for this collection of the writings of Professor Rashid Shaz. I have known of his important work for years and had the pleasure of first meeting him at the Eleventh Session of the Provisional World Parliament that took place in Nainital, India in 2011. He was there because his vision was, and is, global, planetary in scope, and at the same time deeply liberating and transformative. I have continued to follow his work, which I take to be one of the most important voices from within global Islam in today's world. I have also had the pleasure of reading some of his previous books.

This latest book, *Islam: Another chance?* is impressive in both its size and sweeping intellectual content. The book as a whole involves a passionate and well-reasoned appeal to Muslims worldwide to rise in a new renaissance that embodies the most fundamental revelation of the Qur'an – that Islam is tasked to awaken humankind to the imperative of submission to God.

The people of Earth will only live in peace, justice, prosperity, and compassion if they respond to the call to live their lives in submission to God. Such submission is not doctrinal, not a demand that people follow the prescriptive behaviors of Islam or any other religion or but rather is an existential and intellectual demand to submit to God's reign over all humankind. This is the very core of the message of God found in the Qur'an. The word Muslim means 'submitter.'

Using his extensive scholarly knowledge of the Qur'an, Professor Shaz shows that this call at the heart of the Qur'an is to all peoples, not simply those who identify with the Muslim faith. It is a call at the very heart of the great Abrahamic tradition. The story of Abraham in the Qur'an sets the stage for all the revelations to follow to the 'peoples of the book.' Abraham encounters God directly and declares 'I submit.' This simple existential act recognizing God as God defines the essential call expressed in the Qur'an itself. As Professor Shaz writes: 'Today too, if the followers of Mohammad can rediscover what once made them Muslim per se, it is very likely that they find themselves, once again, amidst a new Enlightenment.'

In my view, this existential submission articulated so expertly by Professor Shaz echoes the similar view of the essence of Islam stated by Frithjof Schuon in his great

book entitled *Understanding Islam*. Schuon begins the book by declaring 'Islam is the meeting between God as such and man as such.' The theomorphic structure of man ('man as such') makes him capable of meeting God and in so doing spontaneously choosing submission, immediately recognizing God as God. No mediation is necessary, no relativity, no skepticism and doubt. I understand Professor Shaz's message to us and to the Muslim world in this way. We must regain this central message of the Qur'an and in doing so regain the Islamic world's glorious role in human history: to proclaim this meeting as the most fundamental dimension and need of our human situation.

The way that Professor Shaz arrives at this distilled expression of the heart of the Qur'an involves not only his scholarly knowledge of the holy Qur'an itself but an amazing knowledge of the history of Islamic thought from the death of the Prophet to the present moment. This history comes alive for us in his accounts. We see in what ways the decisions of various Islamic leaders to implement this or that rule of practice was predicated on the needs of their day. There was no intent that these practices become Islamic law for all eternity.

Professor Shaz shows a similar result in the great intellectual debates that have characterized the history of Islam. The distinctions and methods developed to solve the problem of interpretation of the holy text for one historical era in one time and place should not impose on all subsequent historical eras a set of distinctions and methods no longer appropriate to the time. The Qur'an is a permanent revelation that needs to be creatively and intelligently understood anew in each emergent historical epoch.

'Historical Islam is a cultural construct,' he affirms, and Islam must always 'address the contemporary mind and the milieu that shaped it.' This also must be true for our own time. 'Islam: Another chance?' the title of this book asks. Only if the faithful awaken to their God-given task of proclaiming the truth of 'submission' to the world. Without this creative adaptation by the faithful, the force of its central revelation and message risks becoming derailed and misunderstood by newer generations.

This book not only contains a penetrating scholarly exegesis of the Qur'an and an illuminating history of the conflicts and philosophical thought of Islam since its inception. It is also an insightful understanding of modernity since the time of the Renaissance. Professor Shaz characterizes the movement of the Western world away from God beginning with Descartes in the 17th century and moving through the Enlightenment and Kantian thought in the 18th century down to our present lost and dissolute condition in the 21st century.



He reads our contemporary human situation in the light of the philosophical history of the modern world, a world that at first articulated ideals such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and human dignity but since has collapsed in a chaos of economic greed, nation-state imperialism, and post-modern skepticism and cynicism. God has largely been abolished from this world. The global domination of capitalism and militarized nation-state imperialism (regularly directed at Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya) are tearing our world apart, damaging our planetary environment, and threatening an increasingly bleak future not only for Muslims but for humanity as a whole.

Throughout this book, Professor Shaz provides detailed and insightful analyses of current major problems and issues within Islam such as the Palestinian issue, the phenomenon of Hezbollah, the conditions in Lebanon, and the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis. The book is a gold mine of erudition and insight. It was translated from Urdu to English to make it as widely available as possible. Everywhere, within today's wide variety of issues and contexts, it tells us that the glorious divinely commanded mission of Islam to the world can and should be restored.

My own work for a planetary Renaissance through ratification of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth can also speak to an awakening for Muslim countries and Muslim peoples around the world. The 50 or more Muslim countries in the world would have representation in the House of Nations of the democratic World Parliament. And the 1.6 billion Muslim faithful around the world would have direct representation in the House of Peoples. Imperialism and war of all kinds would be ended, and the way opened within the World Parliament for the clear voice of Islam to be in dialogue with the rest of humanity. Muslim support for the Earth Constitution could be a major factor in a new renaissance for Islam.

Islam must proclaim to the world the message of recognizing and submitting to God. This message is needed by all humankind, including the dissolute and thoroughly corrupt Western dominated globalized capitalism and imperialism. Professor Shaz calls for a new dialogue with Christianity, which shares a common ground with Islam, the essence of which is love of God and love of one's neighbor. There can be no peace in the world, he tells us, unless there is peace among the world's great religions.

But our dialogue needs to expand as well to a dialogue with all humanity, for corporate capitalism and the threat of climate collapse have put our entire future in danger. Professor Shaz highlights the historic passion of Islam for knowledge and learning and calls for a 'new university,' a new focus on knowledge in relation to our contemporary world that is not a mere fixation on the past nor an unthought

adherence to blind dogmas. Neither should the Islamic university fall prey to the corruptions that have infected Western universities in the contemporary era. The new university established in the light of the Qur'anic worldview would graduate creative and open students who engage the world with moral and religious clarity and serve as a key vanguard of the new Islamic enlightenment.

Professor Shaz ends his book with a 'Manifesto of the United Islam.' Muslims must go beyond sectarian divisions and unite as spokespersons of the foundational revelation at the heart of the Qur'an and the dynamic proclamation of the meeting of man and God. Professor Shaz's stunning erudition here again illuminates this complex history of sectarianism and division. Again, he shows the unity and vision behind the historical development of the faith. Muslims are 'creatively integrated with the divine revelation,' he affirms. The 'custodians of the final revelation' must rise again united for 'the task of guiding others on the right path.'

This is an extraordinary book emerging from a foremost Muslim thinker concerning contemporary Islam in relation to our complex human situation. It is an illuminating book for non-Muslims and, in my view, is a truly essential book for Muslim readers. With all my heart, I hope that this book succeeds in bringing a unified Islam back to its foundational message that our world needs so badly: the direct, unmediated meeting of God and man.

Prof (Dr.) Glen T. Martin

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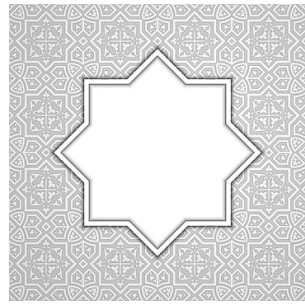
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SECTION I

# The Agenda



# Tension in the Muslim Mind

We Muslims live with a paradox. If we are really the last chosen nation entrusted to lead the world till End Time, why it is so that we are unable to arrest our own decline. Despite the fact that today the Muslim taken together constitute almost a two billion strong population and they are strategically located in energy-rich lands on which depends the future of the world, they are reduced to mere consumers. The new technology has revolutionised the way we live and it is still forcing us to live differently, but we as a nation have almost no share in this process and hence have completely lost control of the happenings around us. The new inventions and the pace of scientific discoveries have confronted us with a host of mind boggling and disturbing questions. For example, what will be the social and ethical fall out of the DNA revolution? If human living on other planets becomes a reality, or if future researches point to arrest the process of aging thus increasing the longevity to a thousand years, how will it affect us? Or, imagine a future scenario where each individual will bear an identifying genetic code or possibly due to a microchip ingrained on him will find himself a prisoner of the tech-world. Can we or should we stop this technological menace? These and many other similar questions may have a bearing on our common future, but the Muslim nation is not in a position to take a decisive stand on any such issues. Unfortunately, those who shape the future agenda today are not among us.

Yet the Qur'an keeps mentioning that the global supremacy and domination is the hallmark of believers:

﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ [03:139]

Those entrusted with world leadership are the people engaged in good deeds. They are, to use the Qur'anic term, the *ibad as-saleheen* or noble people per se. And as compared to the *abd saleh* (*singular*) who is destined to have leadership role, the *kafir* or rebel of God has to be on the margin. A terrible fate awaits him not only in the hereafter, in this world too he is reduced to a non-entity, the *saaghiroon*.

The *kafir*, due to his blind and uncreative opposition to the natural process eventually gets isolated. Devoid of a role in the policy-making, like the animal he lives only on material plane. *Kufr* and *Iman* are not cultural identities. In fact, they are two binary opposing worldviews. Whenever a prophet blows the trumpet of life, the otherwise barren land of spiritualism gets revived and a host of submitters to God emerge from the long-forgotten nations. However, when the same nation of submitters, in course of time, loses the zest for life and many among them take on a destructive course, they unknowingly engineer their own fall. Among the believing nations those who commit *kufr* or bid farewell to life affirming attitude, usually fail to realise that in their vainglory of false religiosity they have in fact walked away from the road to submission. The Qur'an tells us in great detail how the Jewish nation which once was entrusted with world leadership came to believe that that this privilege was their birth right. They failed to realise that this chosenness was due to their adherence to the Torah and not simply because they belonged to a particular nation.

Much like the Jews, we Muslims too have the delusion that despite our muddled religious outlook and the obvious shift in our worldview the world leadership is reserved for us and for ever. Nevertheless, the stark realities of life and the fact that for centuries we find ourselves on a slippery slope give us a very different and awkward feeling. Bridging the gap between our declared position and the manifest reality that surrounds us today is no easy proposition. This dichotomy has led some of our thinkers to believe that the world leadership or supremacy that the Qur'an declares a logical outcome of a life of faith has nothing to do with political or cultural domination in this world. Instead, as they argue, it amounts to excellence in the realm of spiritualism alone. The disparity between the promise and the reality has forced them to conclude that probably what the Qur'an promises is a sort of spiritual ecstasy in this world and salvation in the next. In their opinion, the material world is heaven for the non-believers and a prison house for the people of faith. Then there are other ultra-mystical sects among Muslims who believe that given the deplorable condition of the Muslim Ummah, a remedy is being worked out in providence where the assembly of *autad wa aqtab* – the mythical seers of the spiritual realm, is likely to take a decision soon.

Such mythical, irrational and defeatist interpretations of the world around us have only added to our woes as they deliberately divert our attention from the root cause of our malaise. The mythical mind that has been in the making from the days of Abu Hamid Ghazali has not only been successfully postponing a creative debate on vital issues, it has also failed in creating a new theological paradigm to meet the demands of



our time. Thus, we are forced to live with this theological paradox: if we are the last Ummah chosen to lead the world till end time, why do we have this awkward feeling that the reign of history has slipped from our hands.

Let me elaborate. In Islam, faith without action is not acceptable. Here, faith and action, i.e., *iman* and *amal salih*, move hand in hand. Together they complement each other. In fact, a good deed is the logical outcome of sincere faith, an extension of the faith itself. Whereas as a sincere believer continuously testifies to his faith by his good deeds, the *munafiq* or hypocrite on the other hand, by his/ her contradictory actions goes on negating what (s)he verbally declares. The early generation of Muslims were aware of the implications of faith and hence they saw for themselves a pro-active role in the universe. As upholders of the last revelation they were required to compete (فاستبقوا الخيرات), collaborate and take lead in acts of goodness. Then, *amal salih* was taken as an act of common good. As the Qur'an had projected its Prophet as the mercy unto all, it was quite logical that the good deeds emanating from followers of the prophet become a solace for the entire humanity.

Muslim scholars have generally confused *amal salih* with ritual worship. A close reading of the text, however, would clearly indicate that *amal salih* is much more than the ritual worship or obligatory prayers such as *salah* and *zakat* etc. It is rather an advanced though essential stage of faith:

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ

رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾ [2:277]

Urging the faithful to get involved in *amal salih*, an act distinguished from the obligatory *salah* and *zakat*, clearly indicates that a life in faith goes a long way. If *amal salih* is so clearly other than the ritual worship, then what it is. The Qur'an tells us, oft and on, that all those who submit to Gad and do good deeds are people for whom a place is assured in the heaven:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴾ [2:82]

And this assurance is not for Muslims alone. Even those who come from other faith communities such as the Jews, the Christians, the Sabians, they too, if committed to *amal salih*, deserve fair reward (أجرهم عند ربهم) and an assured amnesty from all kinds of worries in the hereafter (لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون). The *amal salih* is the only criterion of assured success both in this world and in the next for all faith communities, no matter what prophetic tradition they come from. No wonder then, if our loud proclamations of faith devoid of *amal salih* do not yield long awaited results.

The *amal salih*, as propounded in the Qur'an, is an all-inclusive term for general wellbeing in consonance with nature. It is a positive contribution of man to add his own goodness to the universe by delicately and thankfully availing the bounties of the natural world. From keeping the city clean for fellow citizens to inviting them to the worship of one Lord God, or inventing a cure for a deadly disease, each action comes within the purview of *amal salih*. Where as the believer due to his life-affirming and proactive attitude is always busy in making the world a better place to live in, the *kafir* is always hell bent on destroying the harmony of this phenomenal world. In the Qur'anic worldview, *kufir* is opposite to *amal salih*:

﴿ مَن كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا نَفْسِهِمْ يَمْهُدُونَ ﴾ [30:44]

Those who lack a creative, proactive and life-affirming attitude or who are unable to contribute their own share of *amal salih* in the universal projects of common good or who do not think beyond their communitarian interests, such nations find themselves in close allegiance with *kufir*. Such nations find it difficult to sustain a leadership role. This is exactly what had earlier happened with the Jews (كونوا قردة) (خاسئين) and the same has plagued the House of Islam today.

The Qur'an exhorts the believers to think, reflect and make use of the brain to its fullest, yet for the last many centuries the Muslim nation has not been a substantial part of common wellbeing projects, save assuming a leadership role. The modern world appears to us a radically different place as compared to the past when the Ummah's hegemony went unchallenged. The large-scale deployment of modern gadgets, the mass transportation through jumbo jets, the invention of radio, TV, computer and the internet, have not only revolutionised our life, they have also brought knowledge and information within the easy reach of common man. Much has been written on the failure of anti-biotics and the unhealthy side effects of modern medicines, yet we cannot ignore the fact that over-all health sciences have greatly contributed in improving the condition of our life. There were many selfless people who devoted their entire life to scientific researches and who took great pains in carrying out successful inventions. We may not know their names or nationality but for their good deeds or *amal salih* they deserve appreciation from their Lord. It was due to their hard work that today, in the 21st century, we are in a position to breath in the cyber-world, a human extension of the majestic world of God. No doubt, such and the like projects of common good that appear today as purely western constructs owe much to the great masters of the Muslim East of the medieval age, but for the last many centuries our

share has been minimal. The orthodox Muslims even find it difficult to call such acts of common good as *amal salih*.

The closing of the Muslim mind did not come about in one day. Under the influence of *tasawuf*, as early as in the Abbasid Baghdad, Muslims had come to believe that an austere living and resignation were the essence of faith. The monastic living was in vogue that guaranteed the faithful multiple rewards for each mystical formula uttered thus leaving no room for the pain of thinking or pondering on the signs of God. As the emerging Sufi orders of the time were promising a short cut to salvation few would feel tempted to devote their life to the cause of common good. If uttering a particular formula or jumble of words could guarantee salvation, it was sheer waste of time and energy to reflect on the forces of nature or to decipher such forces for improving life on this earth. Although it is no secret that the Qur'an has great appreciation for all those people who reflect as to how the rain comes down from the sky and how the same rain produces from the same soil grains of different variety and colour. Astounded by the awe of God as they are, the Qur'an declares them as true scholars. But our decline was so steep that we even changed the definition of a scholar and all those who had nothing to do with reflecting on the signs of God in the natural world or had no interest in serious researches came to be regarded as scholars simply because they had named their high school certificate as *aalamiyat* and called their graduates as ulema, or scholars. Similarly, the concept of good deed or *amal salih* underwent a radical change. Instead of doing something really good we came to believe that uttering a mystically proven formula a hundred thousand times, or counting God's name on a sack of seeds, or leisurely turning one's finger on an impressive rosary of thousand beads were really the good deeds that could cause wonders in our life. Such pseudo good deeds were vehemently condemned by no less than a man of Caliph Omer's stature in the very early days of Islam. Nevertheless, the emergence of clergy in the Muslim society who always had a soft corner for such spiritual vagaries and the social prominence accorded to religious seers made it difficult to shun this alien notion altogether. Once this change in our perception about the good deeds set in, its fall-out on the Muslim psyche was disastrous. While other nations were busy in various projects of common good thereby maintaining their leading role on issues that concerned the world, we Muslims due to our abstinence from *amal salih* found ourselves isolated and marginalised. Even those amongst us who willy-nilly participated in such projects in their personal capacity had always had an uncomfortable feeling of guilt that probably they were not on the right course. As they lived with a guilty conscience and wore a split personality, they could hardly achieve excellence.

Whereas this mistaken notion about the common good or *amal salih* kept most of sincere Muslims engaged in futile mystical exercises, it compelled many rational minds to take refuge in secularism. The newly invented tools of *amal salih* needed no apprenticeship nor posed any physical or intellectual challenge for the practitioners of faith. More so, they successfully helped create an ivory tower for those religiously inclined people who sought a moratorium on disturbing questions. In our own time, the ever-growing popularity of Sufi Islam or religious passivity and the general acceptance of non-Qur'anic terminologies such as *chilla* (the forty-day religious frivolity), *gasht* (spiritual wanderings in group) etc. point to the fact that a dominant number of Muslims do not want to confront this vitally important question: why despite so much of religious assertion Muslims are no match for a leadership role. The Qur'anic promise of world leadership is clear and candid, though: 'Allah has promised to those amongst you who submit and do acts of goodness, that He will, of surety grant them in the land authority and power as He granted it to those before them'.

﴿ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلِيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلِيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴾ [24:55]

The promise of *istikhlaf*, of worldly power, for the submitters who are committed to good deeds is obviously for this world and hence it cannot be postponed for the hereafter. The Qur'anic God is just; He even takes care of goodness worth an atom's weight

﴿ فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ ﴾ [99:7]

Can we expect a just God to ignore the good deeds of other faith communities and instead keep us at the helm of affairs simply because we live under the delusion of being the '*khaire ummah*', the best of communities?

# Reinventing the Muslim Mind

Ever since I read Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* and Peter D. Kramer's *Listening to Prozac* I wonder if Prozac, Ritalin, Zoloft and the like wonder drugs that help millions of people regain their self-esteem can also be employed in infusing a creative confidence in the Muslim mind. As Prozac or Fluoxetine works as a neurotransmitter, it effectively increases the level of Serotonin in the brain, the low level of which is said to be the main cause of depression, anger and even suicide. Today some 28 million Americans, almost ten per cent of the total population, live on such psychotropic drugs. No wonder then if America is outperforming as a nation and if the Americans are known for their exuberance and arrogance.

Today the Muslims lack confidence not because the entire world is at war with them more so because they find their main source of intellectual and spiritual inspirations locked on them. For so long they have been subject to misguided indoctrination about the potential of their brain that now they are aghast by any suggestion of applying their minds in matters religious. It is almost a matter of creed for them that the Elders have exhausted and perfected the process of thinking on all issues once and for all. This attitude has virtually suspended the entire corpus of revelation and has effectively locked the Ummah in the pre-Islamic mindset of:

﴿ قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آيَاتِنَا كَذَّابًا كَذَّابًا كَذَّابًا كَذَّابًا ﴾ [26:74]

or 'thus we found our forefathers doing it', as the Qur'an aptly puts it.

Given the fragility of the Muslim mind, some of the great luminaries of Islam who devoted their entire life to reviving the Ummah eventually gave up. Abul Kalam Azad who started his career as a revivalist and who created furore in the early 20th century India by making public the blue-print of *hizbollah* – the party of God that were to alter the course of history – soon came to realize that nothing could be achieved with the traditional Muslim mind. In a letter to Muhiuddin Kasuri he declared: 'the ulema are a hopeless lot. To believe that the traditional mind can still give way to regeneration is to believe against the laws of nature. We have no alternative but to

ignore the rigid thinking altogether, focusing on the creation of a new mind which requires a radically different variety of literature and apprenticeship.' Muhammad Iqbal, one of the most prominent ideologues of modern Islam, was voicing a similar concern when he opined that after the termination of the *khilafa* and in the absence of a central controlling authority it was an opportune moment for 'the birth of an international ideal' which, in his opinion, 'has been hitherto overshadowed or rather displaced by the Arabian imperialism of the earlier centuries of Islam.' He fully endorsed the attempt of Muslim liberals 'to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life' (*Reconstruction*, p.134). In a much similar vein, Jamaluddin Afghani and his pupils, known for their penchant for *ijtihad* or rethinking, also called for giving the Muslim mind its due. In his famous treatise *Risalah Al-Tawhid*, Abdahu argued that, as the divine revelation was a guiding light for all generations, it was not fair to deprive the present generation of the right to interpret while allowing the past generations to have a monopoly of the same. In principle, the traditional mind was not averse to re-reading the text. Nonetheless, it made it a precondition that all such rereading must conform to the understanding of the pious elders. It does not require a lot of intelligence to realise that a re-reading, even by a humble definition of the term, must produce a radically different understanding though.

The last few centuries have witnessed an upsurge of revivalist movements calling for a return to the Qur'an. But despite so much hoo-ha if all our efforts ended up in merely creating an illusion of revival it was mainly because we failed to distinguish between the bare text of revelation and the exegetical literature that, in course of time, had built an impregnable fence around it. We in fact do not allow the present generation of believers to approach the text on their own. In the early twentieth century, in the wake of the termination of *khilafa*, the revivalist movements laid special emphasis on understanding the text. In Egypt, Syed Qutb's *Fi Dhilal Al-Qur'an* and in the Indian sub-continent Maudoodi's *Tafheemul Al-Qur'an* and Islahi's *Tadabbur Al-Qur'an* became focus of Islamist's attention. These exegeses, accompanied by the party literature, had a great impact on the global Islamic movement. Written in elegant contemporary prose as it was, the new exegetical literature, however, failed to produce the desired result as in its approach to the text it remained prisoner of the classical understanding. Maudoodi took some thirty years to write his *Tafheem* and Islahi claimed to spend almost half a century to complete his magnum opus *Tadabbur*, yet at the end of their magnificent intellectual journey they emerged as mere Hanafites, the followers of the great jurist of the second century hijra. If 30 or 50 years of systematic

Qur'anic study failed to empower them to approach the text on their own for their own specific setting, such academic ventures howsoever impressive they may appear to be, can only be termed as intellectual luxury. It may be justified for a layman to call himself a Hanafite or a Shafeite solely relying on the understanding of an imam but for the scholars who devote their entire life to a systematic study of the text, clinging to the great masters of the past speaks of an ailing mindset. Unless we are aware of our unique position in history and are confident enough to devise a specific approach to the revelation suited to our specific situation, the way great masters of the past did for theirs, a return to the Qur'an will only be a farfetched reality. We certainly know more of the 21st century social reality than the great luminaries of the past. Seeking solace in the corpus of *fiqh* canonised in the Abbasid Baghdad will now serve no purpose. The classical *fuqaha* measured the journey by a *manzil*, i.e., the maximum distance that a caravan could travel in one go. Based on this measure they would tell us when to shorten the prayer. They never travelled in space jet nor did they ever confront a situation where owing to the internet chat rooms strange men and women could meet in privacy or where due to globalising effects classical terminologies such as *dar-ul-Islam* and *dar-ul-Kufr* would become redundant.

The call to return to the book of God that, in essence, was an invitation to the blind imitation of the pious elders of the past, failed to revive the Ummah. We often overlooked the fact that the pious elders, despite their extraordinary devotion to faith, were also humans like us and hence liable to err. Had we taken their theological and *fiqhi* compendiums as mere pioneering works in academia and not the last word on the topic, there would have always been a possibility of redressing their mistakes. Nevertheless, partly owing to the intellectual anarchy caused by the weakening of the political system and partly due to the sense of sacredness associated with the early centuries of Islam, it was assumed that independent thinking was not everybody's prerogative. This attitude of looking at the past as canonised might have been helpful in curbing the intellectual anarchy of the time but later this in itself became a source of intellectual barrenness for all time to come. As times went by, the canonised past kept us haunting. Things came to such a pass that on any issue of potential controversy, our scholars claimed of achieving consensus sometime back in history and hence, they declared, the issue in question was no more open for discussion. In Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, the claim to achieve consensus once and for all is a false metaphor. If Muslim scholars of a particular period in history had achieved consensus on a specific issue it was their collective understanding of the revelation prompted by the societal demands of their time. Their decisions cannot be binding for us. We have to come



forward with our own response to the revelation suited to our own temporal and spatial settings. This is exactly what God wants us to do:

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ﴾ [47:24]

Does God speak to the 21st century man? Does he speak to him directly or through the dead of the past? Is Qur'an a dead book for us that made sense only to some pious elders in the early centuries? Such questions have a direct bearing on any creative approach to the text. *Salaf* worship or the attitude of:

﴿ قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴾ [26:74]

(thus we found our forefathers doing) was instrumental in calling people to the worship of *Lat* and *Uzzah* -- national idols of pre-Islamic Arabs. Today it is again out to convince us of the infallibility of the pious elders, holding us back from any direct access to the text lest it should be problematic. The new age idols are not the *Lat* and *Uzzah* but those pious elders who, otherwise, have done great service to the faith in their own times. As the creative mind has not been in operation for quite long, there has been a continuous piling up of unresolved issues. Let me take a few examples to elaborate this point.

### THE PALESTINE QUESTION

For almost half a century Palestine has been a mega issue for the Ummah. The traditional Jewry believes that walking four cubic feet in the holy land of Canaan can ensure them a place in heaven. On the other, Muslims strongly feel that Palestine is their homeland not simply because they lived there for centuries but more so because, technically speaking, it is a *wakf* land and hence not negotiable. As both the parties in the conflict claim to have a rock-like stand, the 'holy' land has been turned into a butchering ground and there is no solution in sight. Those who are only emotionally involved with the Palestine problem, watching the conflict boiled out from a safe distance, can easily eulogise the valour and courage of Palestinian brothers and sisters, but ask the Palestinian mothers, sisters and daughters who lose their dear ones on a daily basis how they really feel. Recently, as a rethinking measure when we asked a number of scholars to come out with a possible solution, a dominant majority of them said that they foresee no solution at all. Shall we then let the things pass by watching them as insensitive and mute spectators?

The history of Islam is not only a history of great conquests; it is also a history of strategic retreats. If peace can be achieved through temporary retreats and if the interest of Islam can better be served by such measures, there is no point in insisting on a head

on collision. The Prophet's strategic retreat in *hudaibia*, which the Qur'an terms a clear victory, is a clear signpost for all those who feel trapped in a blind alley. Today, unfortunately, the Ummah is not in a position to take on the state of Israel, and the Muslim rulers, due to their own territorial and dynastic interests, are not willing to play a decisive role. Does it serve any purpose then that some unorganised, unarmed smaller groups just keep on feeding the struggle? Is the *wakf* land a holy cow for us? Or, given the enormous loss of human life we can reconsider the traditional *fiqhi* stand on the issue? I believe the least we can do is to activate our minds drawing on wisdom in the Qur'an.

### THE SHIA-SUNNI SPLIT

Among the many internal contradictions that Muslims have canonised in course of their history, the Shia-Sunni divide remains the most fatal and problematic. Initially a political dispute on succession, it took almost three centuries for both the sects to take a shape different from the other. Now the divide is generally seen as part of the divine scheme and hence unbridgeable. The development of Shia and Sunni Islam as distinct from the real Islam owes much to the heritage literature of a polemical nature which though it originated in the early second century took its distinctive ideological moorings in the 4th century hijra. Whereas the four great masters of *fiqh* have mainly shaped the Sunni Islam, the Shia Islam believes in the divine origin of their imams. The two forms of Islam that have pitched against each other since their inception draw their legitimacy not from the book of God or his prophet but from ordinary humans such as Abu Hanifa, Shafei, Kulaini Qummi and Shaikh Mufeed etc. who in their own time did render great service but due to our flawed perception of history have become some sort of idols for us. If Islam was perfected during the Prophet's time when the Qur'an was the only foundational document and Muslims fared well in the early era without pioneers of Shia or Sunni Islam, it is very much possible to achieve that unison again provided we are willing to put aside the framers of Shia and Sunni Islam. So far history has been let free to determine the context and import of revelation. To know where we went wrong as also to rollback our deviations, we need to give the revelation an upper hand. Rolling back of the Shia and Sunni Islam will not only redeem the Ummah of its perpetual malaise it will also usher in a big bang of ideas, a natural corollary of unadulterated Prophetic voice.

### *AEMMAH ARBA'*

#### OR THE FOUR STUMBLING BLOCKS TO THINKING

The framers of Sunni Islam have also uncannily divided it into at least four divergent, at times conflicting, schools of *fiqh*. The hay days of Muslim empire had

often witnessed a pitched battle among divergent *fiqhi* factions. Ibn Batuta has recorded in great detail how the Shafeite and the Hanbalite mobs had often collided in the streets of Baghdad. In fact the very canonisation of the four schools of *fiqh* in the 7th century hijra Egypt owe much to the *fiqhi* riots. The *fiqhi* division of Sunni Islam haunts us even today. In modern times, wherever the Muslims get an opportunity to establish an Islamic state it is difficult to resolve which *fiqhi* school should get the official status. In modern Pakistan, the internal feuds of various warring sects paved the way for secular elite to take control of the state apparatus. Recently, in the Taliban's Afghanistan where the narrow *Deobandi* version of the Hanafi School was the only valid religion, Muslims of the other *fiqhi* persuasion lived almost a life of dhimmitude. The *fiqhi* divide is very deep, ingrained in the traditional Muslim psyche. It has the potential to jeopardise any future Islamic revival. To say that the future Islamic state shall be ruled by the majority *fiqh* is to ignore the sensitivity of the issue. The *fiqhi* identity is based on the assumption that the specific *fiqhi* school alone epitomises the essence of Islam. How can a believer then forego his *fiqhi* identity simply for the convenience of a 'lesser Muslim' majority?

To achieve unity among our ranks as also to refurbish the broken fabric of Islam we urgently need to go back to the early era where Islam was conceivable without the four great *fuqaha*. In principle, the learned amongst us agree that the four *fuqaha* were not God-ordained. If Islam was available to the masses before their arrival on the scene, it is logical to conceive today the essence of Islam, if not the codex, without them. This is a revolutionary idea and has the potential of putting to the track our centuries long ideological digressions. It has not been long since four simultaneous prayers plagued the holy Harem in Makkah, each *fiqhi* sect praying in isolation conforming to the *fiqhi* norms of a specific imam. It was left for the Najdi reformers of the early 20th century to wrap up simultaneous prayers and unite the Muslims under one prayer leader. If the Bedouin reformers of Najd, with their sheer political will, can undo a long established convention, why cannot the 21st century reformers with amazing media at their command rescue us from the *fiqhi* quagmire?

#### COMMON AGENDA AND OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES

The early generation of Muslims were open to other faith communities and considered them as their natural ally. The Qur'an had approvingly called them as People of the Book and at times even 'people of faith' while inviting them to accept the divine mission in toto:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اَدْخُلُوا فِي السَّلَامِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ

لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿ [2:208]

The remnants of earlier prophetic traditions, despite their ideological dilution, were considered so close to neo-Muslims of the Prophet's time that Qur'an sanctioned close social relations with them. Socialising with them was encouraged as their food was declared *halaal* and Muslim men were allowed to marry their women. The Qur'anic verses allowing social mixing with the People of the Book still exist but they are no longer followed in practice owing to their virtual annulment by the *fuqaha* of the past. There has been a gradual shift in our perception of the other. Instead of considering the other faith communities as our allies, today we insist on condemning them as *kuffar*. We do not want to allow other faith communities to flourish right within the boundaries of an Islamic state. Contrary to this, in the hey day of Islamic *Dawah* when Islam was generally seen as a liberating mission and the progressive Islamic ideology was conquering the hearts and minds beyond the frontiers, the major cities of *dar-al-Islam* were not only the abodes of a sizable non-Muslim population, in many cities they even constituted majority, and their houses of worship were buzzing with the praise of God. Those were momentous times when we considered ourselves as the leader of all faith communities and sought their support for establishing a Godly society. This attitude however gradually changed during the Abbasid period partly due to the emergence of Arab *asabiyyah* – the new group consciousness, and partly due to the psychological impact of the crusades. The *fuqaha* of the time felt compelled to review their relations with 'the other.' What otherwise was a temporary measure to safeguard the empire, later came to be regarded as orthodox Islamic dictates for all time to come.

We also need to readjust the orthodox image of *shibh ahl al-kitab* – faith communities not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Our scholars are not ignorant of the theological arguments put forward by Al-Biruni and Shahristani who advocated that Hindus of India, by virtue of their canon of faith, deserve to be treated as 'People of the Book.' If some God-conscious sects among the Hindus fulfil the criteria of *ahle kitab*; belief in God, in the hereafter, in His books and the prophets and an emphasis on doing good – there is no point in denying what God has decreed for them. As people of faith, they are our allies and should be warmly welcomed to join us in our prophetic struggle. Socialising with them, which includes dining with them and taking their women in marriage, is more in fulfilment of the Qur'anic decree rather than a practical necessity. But for all this to happen we need to have a critical look at the long

established *fiqhi* tradition which has virtually made the Qur'anic injunctions redundant.

The *fiqhi* mind that blossomed to its full during the Abbasid era later became an antithesis of the mind itself as the process of thinking stopped and blind imitation of the past scholars became the norm. Hence onward all our efforts to revive the Ummah have, in effect, been an exercise in reviving a medieval outlook and setting. The upholders of the last revelation who were to lead the world till end time feel shy of the modern world and are struggling to recreate a medieval utopia to which they emotionally belong. A complete ban on the process of thinking has been disastrous. It has virtually turned some very basic and powerful institutions of Islam into mock-plays.

Let me elaborate. Friday sermons have played a key role in the collective life of Muslims from the very beginning. In non-Arab countries, which today contain the dominant majority of Muslims, our insistence on Arabic as official language of the sermon has reduced this lively institution into a mere ritual. Neither the speaker understands what he utters nor does the audience find any rationale for this orchestrated waste of time. In a modern mosque when the muezzin stands up before the pulpit calling the faithful to sermon and during the *adhan* he slightly turns towards the right and then to the left, few realise that these actions have outlived their relevance. In the Prophet's Medina turning to the right and the left helped the message echo in different directions. Today, digital amplifiers more effectively do the same. With the growth of Medina into a township, we are told, when it was no longer convenient for the believers to gather immediately, especially those who lived in new settlements at a distance from the Prophet's mosque, Caliph Omer responded to this new situation by adding one more azan before the sermon allowing everybody enough time to get ready for Friday congregation. If Caliph Omer can institute another azan to keep this institution in tune with the time and safeguard its efficacy, do we still need to turn to the right and the left during the azan when the amplifiers are well in use? And can we allow Friday sermons in local languages in places where neither the speaker nor the listener has an ear to appreciate this poetry in prose.

Yet another reflection of the frozen mindset can be seen in our insistence on visibility of the moon to determine a lunar month. For many amongst us it is a matter of creed. In a world where days and nights are measured in seconds and where we have comprehensive tables giving us the exact date and time of the visibility of moon, of the break of dawn and sunset with utmost precision, our insistence on traditional modes only speaks of our unspoken belief that probably a medieval feel is necessary to live an authentic religious life. No better is the situation in the *salafi* world which otherwise is

supposed to be the abode of pure, creative Islam. Every year, prior to *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the Saudi street witnesses an extraordinary display of heaps of wheat grains in small plastic bags. Devout Muslims consider it obligatory to pay off the *Eid* charity in grains as laid out by *Hanbali fuqaha* of the past. In a consumer society, where baked bread is available even to the poorest, offering such a small amount of wheat to the needy is more an embarrassment than charity. Such actions only enhance one's awkward feeling that to be a Muslim means to live emotionally in the medieval times.

Envisioning Islam in essentially a medieval garb has kept us far removed and for so long from the modern-day realities that now our internal discourses show no inkling of the great global responsibility that we as the last Ummah were supposed to shoulder. The issues that we have been debating for centuries are communitarian in nature and bear little significance for the global community. While other nations are passionately involved in futuristic discourses such as future sources of energy, the possibility of hydrogen fuel, the future of stem cell research, the likely impact of DNA Revolution, ecological imbalance and the menace of globalization etc., we Muslims are still debating whether it is lawful to pronounce three *talaq* in one sitting, whether Muslim women are allowed to expose their face, whether there is a room for digital photography in Islam. Even today, some traditional circles are seriously involved in finding a *fiqhi ratio legis* for allowing the TV in Muslim homes. They argue that the image on a TV screen is not a photo but an image and hence allowed. Irrespective of the seeming religiosity of these arguments, it is not difficult to conclude that the discourse of Muslims does not resonate with their claimed status of being the Ummah of the last Prophet, a mercy to all mankind. As Muslim discourse became a battleground for trivial polemics having no bearing on the world around us, it was natural for them to recede to the trashcan of history from the once celebrated position of world leadership. Those eager to make a new beginning must accept beforehand that the traditional mind will lead them to nowhere. A new Muslim mind is the minimum to start with. Without reactivating our brains, we will surely fall short of realising in full the nature and magnitude of our malaise. The Qur'anic exhortations to look, think, reflect and visualise (*unzur, tafakkur, ta'qqul* and *tadabbur*) can empower us with a confident and enlightened mind which may accede to the fact that the 21st century issues have not been settled by the *fuqaha* of the past and the eternal light of revelation can guide us the same way as it did the great *fuqaha* of the past.

# Undoing the Church in Islam

In earlier times, Islam was marked by simplicity and spontaneity. When Abraham, the archetypal Muslim and the role model for all submitters to come, was asked to submit (his will to God), he did it with utmost spontaneity; he said: ‘I submit to the Lord and Cherisher of the universe’ [2:131].

﴿ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمَ ۖ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾ [2:131]

And similar was the case with the Queen of Sheba who wasted no time in accepting the truth once it became clear to her that Solomon was no ordinary king but a messenger of God. She made a simple confession: ‘O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, now I do submit, like Solomon, to the Lord of the universe [27:44].

﴿ قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾ [27:44]

Submitting to God then was a simple affair till the organized religions arrived on the scene.

Throughout history, religion has never been defeated by irreligion or atheism. Rather, its worst enemy has always been the organized or institutionalized religion. In the New Testament we find Jesus bitterly criticizing the Pharisees (Rabbis and Shauykh of Jesus’ time) for ignoring the most important things; justice, mercy and faith. The leaders of organized religion though they pretend to be, they are in fact hypocrites who ‘strain out a gnat and swallow a camel’. Again, to quote Jesus: ‘they are like beautiful mausoleums full of dead men’s bones, and of foulness and corruption’ (Matthew, 24-27). And in the Qur’an, we are told that one of the main objectives of the Meccan Prophet (*an-nabi al-ummi*) was to relieve mankind of the yoke of religious formalism: ‘from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them’ [7:157].

﴿ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ



عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ فَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِهِ ۖ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ  
الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾ [7:157]

Islam recognizes no church and authorizes no specific group of people to perform religious rites. Rather it empowers each individual to be his own Pope and his own intermediary to God. However, despite this very clear ideological stand, it is an unfortunate fact that gradually, over the centuries, a church-like phenomenon stealthily cropped up in the body politic of Islam and a group of religious bandits, the ulema monopolized the right to interpret God's words. This did not happen in one day. We need to pin-point the major digressions in our intellectual history, a point that I will later return to.

The first generation of Muslims looked at the Qur'an as a book of guidance for the commoner and the elite alike, *hudallil muttaqeen* or *bayanul-lin-nas*, to use the Qur'anic expressions. As for those issues that were not explicitly mentioned in the Book, it was not difficult for this generation of Muslims to reach an agreement given the basic Qur'anic guidelines to maintaining a balance between justice and mercy. These judgments, however, despite engaging the best minds of the time were not static or eternal truths that would deliver the same standard of justice even when the circumstances had completely changed. When Omer, the second caliph, felt compelled to modify some of the accepted norms that were in force during the tenure of Abu Bakr or even the Prophet himself, he was simply asserting that one should look into the spirit behind the norm and not the norm itself. Omer made many radical changes to the norms (*sunan*) that his predecessors had set in. For example, he took a radically different stand on *moallefatul quloob* – the financial help usually offered to pacify potential enemies or to win the heart of neo-converts. He also introduced major changes in the way booty was distributed and took a firm stand on the nature of the conquered lands. Yet he was sure that his measures were better suited to ensure justice in the changed situation.

In the early era of Islam when the caliph or their governors, before making a decision on the issue in question, considered it necessary to look into the accepted norms – or the *sunan* as they called it, they were mainly culling from the cumulative wisdom of generations. Justice was their main concern and given the basic Qur'anic guidelines it was always wise to draw on many minds to evaluate if the specific *sunan* or *maruf* still held promise of delivering justice. Employing one's mind then was also part of the accepted norm. Those engaged in this intellectual activity were held in high esteem. They were called *ahl-ar-ray*, men of sound opinion. However, drawing on the

cumulative wisdom is one thing and the search for legitimacy is something else. Till the end of first century hijra to be an *ahl-ar-ray* was an honour, a social recognition that the individual's counsel could be trusted. But with the beginning of the second century, owing to the state patronage extended to the collectors of Hadith, the intellectual scene gradually changed. If the *sunan* can be looked into to draw on cumulative wisdom, they argued, the Prophet's Hadith even if its chain of transmission is doubtful stands a better chance of enriching our understanding. By the end of the second century, advocates of this view who called themselves *ahl-al-Hadith* gained upper-hand. They dubbed the *ahl-ar-ray* as *ahl-al-hawa-wal-bid'a*. This new trend to seek legitimacy in the Hadith literature for each and every action eventually culminated in the production of numerous books on Hadith, a better example of which was Musnad Ahmaed, a compendium of some forty thousand Hadith. Abu Hanifa, who was one of the most towering figures among *ahl-ar-ray*, it is said, had come across only seventeen *Ahadith* and therefore he felt obliged to apply his own mind on the issues that confronted him.

The new quest for legitimacy beyond the Qur'an and in the historical material that filtered through individual perception of the narrators had a devastating impact on the Muslim mind. Now it was generally assumed that the key to the Qur'anic understanding lay in the historical material, the *aqwal-o-aasar*, that were preserved in numerous volumes and only the specialists were in a position to say something about it. The access to the Qur'an then, was effectively denied to the common man. Later, more stringent conditions were laid down for those willing to speak on 'religious' issues. Some declared that the memorization of at least some 300,000 *ahadith* was necessary to qualify one to issue religious edicts. Yet another group considered that mere committing the *al-Mabsoot* to memory was equally sufficient for qualifying a believer to be a mufti. As for the Qur'anic revelation, it was generally assumed that only those experts should approach the text who have a thorough knowledge of the Hadith corpus, of the historical context as well as sufficient insight into the *naasikh* and *mansookh* – the so called abrogated verses. In short, they came to believe that the Book of God was meant for the learned elite alone. According to Shafei it was only the prerogative of the learned elite, the *arrasikhoon fil ilm*. In his famous treatise *Al-Risalah* while arguing in support of *ijma* and the rationale behind it, he went to the extent of arguing that other than the scholars or the specialists the common man was under no obligation to be familiar with such issues.

The Qur'an as it was revealed on Mohammad is available to us, even today. But the religious leadership among Muslims, the hidden church, or the invisible Vatican

does not allow us to engage with the revelation on our own. We are free to recite but not to interpret. Instead of solely relying on the revealed text, for centuries, we Muslims have been continuously told that Islamic Law, the *shariah*, draws from four main sources; the Qur'an, the Hadith, the *ijma* and the *qiyas*. By placing the Revelation at par with historical constructs and rational tools we made no ordinary mistake. While the revelation can assure us where to go, the analogical reasoning -- may we call it *istehsaan*, *istislaah* or *masaleh mursela*, based on a specific historical construct -- is bound to lead us in diametrically opposing directions. Yet there is no dearth of nice people who would believe that the *ijma* is a conclusive judgement for all time to come, and that the issue in question is sealed forever. Some would even dare to place the *ijma* a level above the revelation. As the famed Hanbali scholar Ibn Aqeel argues, the text despite being infallible can be abrogated by another verse. But, according to him, the same is not true with the *ijma*. Once it has taken place nothing can annul it. This mode of thinking that there are many issues on which a consensus has been reached and that they cannot be re-opened for discussion, has put barriers right inside the Muslim mind. And as we are not supposed to make our own reading of the text, the sum total of our Qur'anic insight remains what our elders have drawn centuries ago and for their own social context. Being humans, as they were, for sure they have erred, but we are forced to carry their errors on our shoulders. For it is generally upheld that any departure from the conventional exegesis of the Qur'an, if not supported by any great masters of the past, will fall under *tafseer bir-ray* and hence shall not be acceptable.

Can we muster enough courage then, to re-open the book of God? We live in a society that believes that the religious debate has come to a close, and forever. There are people amongst us who sincerely believe that human mind is not capable any more of directly inferring guidance from the text and that the great *fuqaha* of the past have settled the issues once and for all. Some even have gone to the extent of believing that any verse of the Qur'an that does not go hand in hand with the opinions of the great masters is either an inconclusive command or an abrogated one, as al-Karkhi the famous Hanafite *faqeeh* would make us believe. Then there is a widespread fallacy among Muslims that the emergence of the four orthodox schools of *fiqh* in Sunni Islam is a God-ordained scheme and therefore it never occurs to us that we can conceive an Islamic living without them. Amidst the great masters of the past we often encounter a medieval feel as their *fiqh* was mainly a response to the Abbasid milieu and despite our clear-headedness that as compared to the corpus of *fiqh* the book of

God can deliver us more, we are afraid of a fresh start. We are in fact afraid of the great intellectual revolution that a fresh reading of the text holds promise of.

Opening the book of God, yet again, will be an epoch-making event. It will change the very course of human history. No doubt, opening the book in the absence of the Prophet has its own risks. But this is what God wants us to do as he is not going to send any other messenger. The book alone has to suffice in the absence of the prophet. The re-opening of the book involves some basic questions to be sorted out. Who should really command the sole authority to interpret God's word; the religious elite, the ulema, the learned members of the *fiqhi* assemblies, the supreme councils of ulema that enjoy state patronage or the ministries of Islamic and *waqf* affairs? Who is the legitimate spokesman of God on this earth? Can the Qur'an be studied in its own light and in contemporary milieu or it can only be studied in a chosen *fiqhi* paradigm? These questions deserve to be passionately debated before we embark on a re-opening.

Some eleven centuries have elapsed since the term *mazhab* in the given sense surfaced on the scene, at the end of the first century hijra. A derivative of *zahaba yazhabo*, initially it was meant to denote that a certain scholar of repute went this way or held that opinion. Then the term *mazhab*, that has split us today into many factions, was expressive of a mere methodology. And that was that. It was not in their wildest imagination that one day this academic tool of analysis would result in such a deep division within the body politic of Islam and the future generations of Muslims would feel compelled to wear one of the *fiqhi* identities. Can there be a greater intellectual oppression than this that the people with sound mind and responsive heart feel compelled to align their understanding of the text with one of the great *fuqaha* of the past and take refuge in one of the *fiqhi* camps despite the fact that these *fiqhi* divisions are products of history and certainly not God-ordained by any stretch of the imagination? There were dozens of *fiqhi* schools and their masters who were lost in history. The four or five *mazahib* that survived mainly due to the state patronage accorded to them, have been in conflicting terms with one another since their inception. It remains yet to be decided who is *ahl-al-hawa* and who rightly deserves to be called *ahl-al-Hadith*, who is *ahl-al-adl* and who can rightly claim the mantle of *ahl-as-sunnah-wal-jama'ah*.

It is generally assumed that without the help of great *fuqaha* an Islamic living is unthinkable. Probably there is no greater fallacy than this under the sky that has kept the Muslim mind mesmerized for centuries. Be it the details involving obligatory prayers or who is liable to pay *zakat* or wherefrom one should embark on his journey for Haj, which of the issues our *fuqaha* have really sorted out? None. The fact is that in

practical life despite being dubbed as the follower of a *mazhab* nobody minutely follows his *faqeeh*. I have yet to come across a Hanafi who observes 40 *sunnah* of *salah* as laid down by Hanafi school or a Hanbali who makes it a point to observe some 68 *sunnah* of *salah* as laid down by the Hanbali *fuqaha*. The books of *fiqh* read like compendiums of differences on each single issue. There is virtually nothing on which the *fuqaha* can claim to have achieved consensus. But the general misconception that it is the *fiqh* that runs our religious machine has made us totally dependent on humans like ourselves. When a *faqeeh* or a *mufti* suggests to us to take out 40 buckets of water in order to clean a well of the foul smell of a dead dog or when a Hanafi *faqeeh* tells us to wash simply either corner of the cloth if it is dry and we do not know which part of the cloth got wet with urine, he does not say so under any heavenly guidance. Instead, he draws from the books of his masters or at times, though rarely, employs his own mind. The same mind with which God has endowed each one of us. There is no point then that instead of applying our own minds we solely rely on other humans like us. If the Shafei school provides us with a tall menu of permissible food and if the Hanafite has a relatively small list of the kind of meat that one should consume, it is a matter of personal preference influenced by spatio-temporal realities and has no divine origin whatsoever. The lawful and the prohibited are explicitly told in the Qur'an. Other than that, be it as how to shoo a wasp sitting right on our nose or how to deal with a small but irritating fly, we must fend for ourselves employing the best method suitable for our specific situations.

An effective re-opening of the book demands no less than the ending of the church-like situation in the Muslim society. As this invisible church, despite the elapse of some eleven centuries, has not manifested itself in any concrete single institution, it is beyond any Luther or Calvin to stand to this challenge. It needs no less than the charisma of the divine revelation to put an end to this vaguely felt and clandestinely organized institution. At most what we can do is to let the word of God speak for itself. We must convince every thinking mind amongst us that the methodology of Qur'anic understanding employed by our predecessors was most suited to their time. It was their way of being sure that justice is delivered and the Qur'anic intent is met. In a changed situation, unmindfully implementing the same may not meet the same standard of justice and at times can be counter-productive. When Omer, the second caliph, temporarily suspended the Qur'anic punishment of amputation of one's hand for theft, he was sure that this was the right measure to ensure justice in the days of famine. Similarly when he discouraged Muslims to marry the women of *ahl-al-kitab* or when the latter *fuqaha* made it a point not to let Muslim men marry the women of *ahl-*

*al-kitab* despite explicit Qur'anic sanction to do so, they were ensuring, in their own way, a social harmony where justice and peace reign supreme. Our historians also talk of Omerian stipulations that imposed on *ahl-adhdhimmah* (the non-Muslims) to wear *al-ghiar*, a long coat, so that they might be easily identified. They were not allowed horse riding or purchasing property or building churches in the Muslim lands. These stipulations were suited to their context. They may not produce the same social harmony in our radically changed world where reciprocation is the rule of diplomatic conduct.

Let us take some other examples. Taking a cue from the Qur'anic verse – 'if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three, or four...'

﴿ وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي آلَيْتِنِي فَاَنْكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَنِّي وَتَلَدْتَ وَرَبَعٌ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا ﴾ [4:3]

– when our *fuqaha* preferred to generalize this specific context for marrying up to four women at one and the same time probably they thought that making legitimate room for war widows was more in tune with achieving social justice. This situation may not last for ever. Then, in the Qur'an we encounter verses such as: 'Had God willed He would have made you a single nation but it is His scheme to test you in what He has given you, so keep competing in goodness'

﴿ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَاً وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴾ [5:48]

Such and other similar verses indicate that salvation is no single nation's monopoly, as we come across the verse: 'those who believe and those of the Jews, and the Christians and the Sabians and whosoever believes in God and the day of judgment and work righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve [2:62].

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنَ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلُوا صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾ [2:62]

Our *mufasssiroon* and *fuqaha* have made us believe that such and other similar verses stand abrogated. This is a pure nonsense to believe that any verse of the Qur'an is not to be taken for guidance any more or putting any verse to practice will invoke God's wrath or will amount to sinning. In an ever-shrinking world where the boundaries between *dar-al-Islam* and *dar-al-kufr* have simply evaporated and where it

is no more possible for any group to live in isolation, forging a united front of the faith communities based on *kalimatun sawa* is more needed than ever. Ignoring the Qur'anic charter of common programme and mindlessly insisting on the traditional interpretation that in the verse:

﴿ غَيْرَ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴾ [1:7]

the nation on whom God's wrath fell and those who went astray are the Jewish and Christian nations respectively, will not take us anywhere. In a nutshell, the reopening of the book will mean that we are mature enough to read the text on our own and are willing, if need be, to take a course different from our predecessors. As long as we are not willing to absorb this psychological shock all our claims of re-opening will amount to putting further seal on it.

# The Case for a Reformed Islam

Some 1.6 billion people on this planet believe that by virtue of being the followers of the last Prophet they have been entrusted to play a very special role in future history. This belief in their chosenness (*khairu ummah*) is as much part of their faith as the belief in the oneness of God almighty, His messengers, the hereafter and the divine agency of angels. This ideological stance of world leadership as opposed to the stark realities of real world where they find themselves in the web of global enmity and hatred have created a split personality among them. If we are really the *khairu ummah* – the chosen people to lead history till end time – why for centuries have we found ourselves so much on the margins of history? they would ask.

That the Muslim community is in a state of perpetual decline and that something has gone awry in centuries long journey are no novel contentions any more. However, so far Muslim intellectuals and reformers have been concentrating on mere reforming the Muslim society. Reforming or purging the historical Islam of alien elements has not been their focus of attention. They conveniently ignored the fact that historical Islam as it was transmitted to us through generations had absorbed varieties of individual perceptions and human interpretations. The canonization of the four schools of *fiqh* in Sunni Islam in the 9th century hijra further muddled the Muslim mind. We took our intellectual digressions as the given, as if the four great *fuqaha* were part of the divine scheme, as Waliullah ad-Dehlawi would later come to argue in the 18th century. *Ijtihad*, an independent and fresh reading of the text, was accepted in principle but not to the extent of leading to founding a fifth school. In short, we were only allowed to think within the *fiqhi* paradigms of the four schools and that too without any critical appraisal of the intellectual premise on which these schools were founded. A truly fresh or independent reading of the text, it was supposed, demanded a *mujtahid mutlaq*, a repository of all-knowledge, an all-knowing legendary mind whom the later centuries had stopped producing, we were told. Bringing thus the Muslim mind to a complete halt was disastrous, a point that I shall later return to.



The modern-day Islamic movements vociferously argue that returning to Islam will once again take the Muslim Ummah back to its glory. However, they fail to realise that the kind of ideological package that we are delivering to the beleaguered Ummah today in the name of Islam is not the same that was once put forward by the Holy Prophet in the 6th century Arabia. I believe that the prophetic Islam in its pristine purity needs to be reconstructed before we embark on any Islamising mission.

The very fact that the Muslim Ummah is no single monolithic group and that there are many varied perceptions of Islam often in conflict with one another, is enough indication that reforming historical Islam has a religious *ratio legis*. Each group among Muslims draws its legitimacy from its claim that it alone has inherited the essence of true Islam and hence it alone has the sole right to salvation. According to this view that is held with varying intensity by almost all sects and religious groups, the other sects need to be reformed to bring them back to original Islam. But no group allows the same reformation within its own ranks lest it should end up in the dismantlement of the group itself.

Let us elaborate. For example, the *salafis*, in principle, do not believe in *taqleed*, a blind following of the great *fuqaha* of the past. Instead, they encourage going back to the Qur'an and sunnah. But their visions of the sunnah and search for it in historical material have made them prisoners of historical constructs. Which book can be more authentically helpful in reconstructing the spatial and temporal qualities of the prophet's time than the Qur'an itself? Any reading of the Qur'an in the light of historical reportage is bound to incorporate human misgivings. The *ahl-al-Hadith*, as they proudly call themselves, place extra-ordinary emphasis on the books of Hadith, which, by any honest assessment are history in a most authenticated form that humans can imagine yet not free from human error and by no count as pure and definite as the exact words of the Revelation. Purging historical Islam of the alien and human interpretative elements of the past would only be possible if we have the courage and insight to critically evaluate historical and interpretative writings in the light of the Qur'an and not vice versa.

So far *Ijtihad* has been mainly confined to finding a correlation among the four conflicting schools of *fiqh*. We have been vaguely silent on the issue whether it is possible to imagine an Islamic living without the four great *fuqaha* of the past. If the great *fuqaha* were not God-ordained and if Islam was perfected long before their arrival on the scene, why do we fear that wrapping them up once and for all would dismantle our religious structure? Is really the *fiqhi* material of the past so essential and central to Islam? Is *fiqh* binding like the Qur'an and *uswah* of the Prophet? Not so, if we ask the Qur'an which urges everybody to think, reflect and extract his own share of the guidance. The Qur'an, in its own words, is the *bayanul-lin-nas* or the *hudal-lil-*

*muttaqeen* i.e. everyman's guide to salvation. Humans are free to formulate – for convenience's sake – a code of living for their own time and context but this should not attain sanctity for the later generations. In short, we should not associate any other book with the Book of God.

*Taqleed* or blind imitation can lead us to nowhere. It can only create an illusion of religiosity. The Israelites who were once chosen for world leadership found the reins of history slipping from their hands when they came to believe that their elders had extracted the essential guidance from the Torah and for them it was only to follow the Talmudic edicts. Without the Talmud it became impossible for them to think of a religious living. Things came to such a pass that the *fiqh* of Hillel and Shammai and the words of Rabbi Akiva became inseparable parts of Judaism. Some even came to believe that Rabbi Akiva knew more of the intent of the Torah than Moses himself. Such misplaced notions about the divine revelation that it has been exhausted in full by the elders and that there is nothing left for us to think, place barriers right inside our minds.

The Israelites, despite their long tradition of erudite scholarship, were unable to reconnect themselves with the Torah; for they found the intent of the text heavily fenced and guarded by the Talmudic writers. And as they held the Talmud as sacred as the text itself, the intellectual detours became simply unsurpassable for them. By bringing the mind to a complete halt they engineered their own doom. They lost their creativity and leadership. In the words of Qur'an, they were soon reduced to the *qeradatun khaseein*, an aping nation with no self-confidence and self-respect. Any nation that ceases to offer a creative solution or, as the Qur'an puts it, solely relies on the wisdom of the dead –

﴿ قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَّالِكِ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴾ [26:74]

is doomed to perish.

### HISTORICAL ISLAM VS. REFORMED/ PRISTINE ISLAM

Historical Islam is a cultural construct. It is an amalgam of Islam plus many other elements. Attracted by the contemporary debates of their time, Muslim scholars deemed it necessary to readjust their visions of Islam. And they were not to be blamed for this. No religious philosophy operates in a vacuum. It has to address the contemporary mind and the milieu that has shaped it. It is for the later generations to distinguish between the message and the milieu. In the Abbasid Baghdad, the translation of Greek corpus of knowledge into Arabic dazzled the Muslim mind. The early religious communities and their scholars who had converted to Islam influenced the study of Islam with the

methodology that they had previously mastered. Greek knowledge and Talmudic modes of enquiry influenced the development of *fiqhi* literature to a great extent. And the emergence of *Taswwuf* among Muslims owes much to Christian austerity that had a long history of abandoning the world and which had gathered romantic appeal in the materially well-off Muslim society of the time. Then there were personal inclinations of some towering individuals that went into the shaping of many divergent versions of Islam in course of time. The many colours of historical Islam drew mainly from human interpretative material yet they all were considered legitimate as the interpreters of Islam had attained by then the status of religious authority. Each sect among Muslims soon created a set of books that not only distinguished them from the other groups but also controlled and governed their religious sensibilities. For example, the historical reportage about the Prophet became key to Islamic understanding among the *ahl-al-Hadith* while among the Shiites no understanding of Islam was authentic unless it came down to them through the 'infallible' imams. And in the mainstream Sunni Islam it became almost impossible to conceive Islam without the corpus *fiqh*. Later, with the arrival of religious organisations on the scene, the founder's writings became pivotal to Islamic understanding. The emergence of many humanly made Qur'ans parallel to the Book of God resulted in the fragmentation of one Ummah into many warring factions. Once the human Qur'ans came to play a key role in our religious life, it became almost impossible to undo the human misgivings that had cropped up in the writings of our ulema. From Shafei to our time, it has been an accepted convention to look at the message of God through humanly constructed prisms. When Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali first published his books, he was vehemently opposed by the ulema of the time. The protest was so strong that his books were burnt in public across the Muslim world. But gradually the opposition subsided and his views melted into the mainstream Muslim thinking. Today, the same Ghazzali is considered as the *hujjatul-Islam*, the touchstone of Islamic understanding. The mixing of the divine with human intent is an on-going phenomenon in historical Islam.

Contrary to its historical counterpart, the pristine Islam believes that it is preserved and for ever in the pages of the Qur'an and it can be reconstructed in full at any point of time. The proponents of the pristine Islam look at the Qur'an as a contemporary document and a self-sufficient book of guidance. They believe that there is no harm in benefiting from the learned elders of the past but they should not be binding on us at all. They do not discard the heritage literature altogether yet they believe that the learned elders are not the final word. Glorifying our elders will do no good to us:

﴿ تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾ [2:134]

A frank and honest appraisal of the interpretative material on Islam, spanning some thirteen centuries, will be an epoch-making initiative. It will be like constructing anew the long-forgotten dicta of Islam. We should not lose sight of the fact that it is basically the power of ideas that shape the destiny of a nation. Reconstructing the Qur'anic dicta for our time will radically change the uncreative mindset of the Ummah which considers the addition of copious footnotes to the old books as the peak of academic achievement.

The call for a re-evaluation of existing literature on Islam in a revelatory paradigm should not be taken as a mere academic move. Conventional academic movements can only add further shades to the existing colours of Islam. Reconstructing the pristine Islam would demand from us a willing mind and a receptive soul. That is to say, the modern-day recipient has to be fully aware of the splendour of revelation and at the same time has to have the essential self-esteem and confidence that he, and no one else, is the addressee of this great message. Being human, no doubt, we have our own limitations. But despite all our failings God wants us to uphold and comprehend His sublime message. He commands us, time and again, to apply our brains in getting to the divine intent. Each person has to make his own effort. This alone can pave the way for the re-opening of the Book that lies abandoned for centuries due to our excessive reliance on the Elders.

The Qur'an addresses the common man. It is a holy thread that directly connects man with God. The emergence of a church-like situation in Muslim society, the emergence of a clergy who claim the sole right to interpret God's intent is an alien notion that made its way in the Muslim thought during the Abbasid Empire. Pristine Islam does not believe in any religious hierarchy. God has not appointed anybody as His representative on this earth nor the Prophet nominated any individual or specific group as his deputy. Instead, we Muslims believe that as upholders of the Last Revelation the Ummah as a whole has been assigned to carry on the prophetic mission. The Prophet during his last moments purposely abstained from appointing anybody as the leader of the Muslims lest it may give undue edge to a specific individual over the others. Yet despite this so clear anti-clergy ideological stance, the presence of an organised religious hierarchy among Muslims clearly indicates that something has struck at the very root of Islamic mission. Like the Catholic Church where one finds Pope, Bishop and Father we too have *Samahtu-sh-Shaikh*, *Fazilatu-sh-Shaikh* and among the Shiites a clerical order of *Aayatullah-al-Uzma*, *Aayatullah* and *Hujjatul-Islam* etc. The ulema of Islam no matter how different or heavenly they might appear to be, have not descended from the sky and hence their utterances should not go unchecked.

What could not be done in the past centuries can be achieved now. Let the sublime light of revelation shine our way!

# Not without an Intellectual Breakthrough

In historical parlance we know of ups and downs and of turning points. The two, however, may not be confused. While the former denotes a continuity of the status quo, the latter is indicative of a break away from the past. The recent victory of Hizbollah in 2006 *Harb Tammuz* though a positive development should not be seen as a turning point. Nor should we let this event hijack the intellectual discourse in the Muslim world.

That Hizbollah has astutely exposed, probably for the first time in recent history, the supposed invincibility of Israel and many in the Arab world are expressing their disgust for the long cherished Arab inaction, is no doubt indicative of the birth of new emotions. If a small militia of motivated individuals can confront the most sophisticated army, why cannot the 56 Muslim states, with so much resources at their command, take control of their own destiny. The analogy is simple though highly misleading.

Having been prisoners of rhetoric for so long, we prefer to live with fallacies. If every Muslim simply throws a bucket of water on Israel, so we are told, the Israeli state will be eradicated. This could be a marvellous poetic idea but it fails to enlighten us as to why the Muslims have not been able to act it out. Emotionally charged rhetoric and worn out pompous terminologies that we are so fond of using have in fact made our intellectual discourse futile as they no longer refer to the real world but stem from an imaginary world of our own making.

Not only is the intellectual discourse in the Muslim world devoid of vital issues, in fact the entire Ummah today is living in a world of make-believe. Let me explain. On the surface it appears as if the Muslim world is bubbling with zest of life, the rulers are sovereign in their policy-making and the religious life is in full swing. But a close look at the situation tells us an altogether different story. True, they have an army and a semblance of state apparatus, but they are merely to uphold that illusion, that pomp without power. The same is true of the religious hemisphere where a host of tarbush-clad ulema and *ghotra*-laden shauykh are ever willing to lay out minute details of ritual

worship. But here too things are more theatrical than real. Many amongst them claim to be the *faqeeh-ul-asr* or the grand mufti, thereby creating an illusion that in this age they are the epitome of religious understanding while in reality if at all they can do anything they copiously quote from the wisdom of the dead. Be they religious scholars or the ruling elite, they live in a fake world, as characters of an orchestrated drama, as shadows of the real self.

As an Ummah our predicament is twofold; we are unable to see the things as they are, and secondly, we often take an ordinary event as a turning point. The high pitch of optimism during the recent Lebanon crisis would better explain this point. The recent 'victory' of Hizbollah in Lebanon was a strange victory where the victor had no say in stipulating the conditions for a ceasefire. Hizbollah has been successful, no doubt, in maintaining her psychological and emotional self intact. Given the military prowess of Israel, this in itself is a great achievement. But calling it an outright victory is not only disastrous for our future, it also leaves many vital questions unanswered. Why despite our willingness to do everything possible we fail to confront the enemy on an equal technological footing? Why despite the abundance of human and material resources at our command today do we have access only to some crude and far less effective zizal missiles and not a laser-guided precision bomb or an F-16 or a B-52 bomber? Resistance can create hurdles and it can even successfully bring down a mighty empire but it cannot build in its place an alternative system. A revival of the Ummah then certainly has to come from somewhere else.

### REMOVING THE INTELLECTUAL DETOURS

The language of resistance can be no match for the language of mercy. At a point of history when the language of resistance has created some intellectual detour for us, an intellectual breakthrough leading to reconstructing the prophetic metaphor requires a critical look at our heritage literature spanning some thirteen centuries. As it has been the norm to look at the early centuries as our golden age, it became difficult to distinguish the pious elders from the rotten ones, the latter being known as fabricators. Once an alien thought stealthily made its way in early writings, it was unmindfully quoted by the later writers so much so that it became part and parcel of our intellectual self. Take for example the *Tafseer* literature which will simply cease to exist if we remove the folktales or the *Israeliyat* as we call it, and where one is never sure which historical context really served as prelude to the revelation. The same is true of the Hadith compendiums that were mainly compiled to drive the fabricators away. Mysticism has a strong penchant for Christian monastic tradition and the much-

celebrated issues in Muslim theology such as free-will and determinism speak of Greek influences. And finally, the very transformation of Islamic polity into dynastic rule owes much to the local tribal ethos and the kingship pattern prevalent during the time. Needless to emphasise, the intellectual heritage of Islam is yet to be purged out of the alien notions that infiltrated in early years, more precisely during the second century of Islam.

The emergence of dynastic rule in Islam which dates back as early as the first century hijra was not in consonance with the Qur'anic worldview yet it was generally tolerated to avoid the internal feuds that had gripped the early Muslim society after the murder of the third caliph. And after the failed attempt of Omer II who wanted to restore the prophetic model of governance it was assumed that political reformation may not yield positive results and hence Muslims should accept the status quo for the sake of unity and peace. From Omer II to the last Ottoman caliph, a period spanning some twelve centuries, an official version of Islam was mainly controlled by the political system. The shaikhul Islam or the chief religious authority played a key role in shaping the Muslim mind. History records many a great luminaries of Islam who in their own times were considered as great scholars but as they did not enjoy state patronage they were marginalised in their time and their great works did not survive. Out of some 50 great *fuqaha* of the first two centuries only four could survive and that too due to the canonization of the four schools of sunni Islam during the reign of Malik-az-Zahir Sultan Baibars. We also hear of many collections of Hadith and many compendiums of authenticated traditions (*sahih*) that are no more available to us.

The official Islam however was no monolithic version as it had to cope with the changing political equations. We had the Umayyad Islam against the Alawites and also the Khawarij who maintained an equal distance from both of them. The Abbasids had their own version of Islam and so had the Fatimites of Egypt and those who founded the Spanish Khilafa away from the central control. As the ruling elite monopolised Islamic interpretation the un-official versions were to find a space only on the margins. Their exponents were either crushed by ruthless political power or they were to keep their mouths shut – a process that later came to be known as *taqyyia*, a well thought out philosophy of political pacifism. The exponents of official Islam maintained that accepting the *waliul-amr*, no matter even if he had acquired power by brute force, was in the greater interest of Islam and Muslims. Changing the political set-up by armed struggle was openly discouraged and the rebels were dubbed as khawarij. The official Islam thus came to be known as the *sabilul-momeneen*, enjoying the blessings of God. Controlling the interpretation of Islam and twisting it to their own agenda, the system

left almost no room to reconstruct the original Qur'anic paradigm without dismantling the system itself. Today any attempt to reconstruct the Qur'anic paradigm once again or reinvent the language of mercy cannot be successful unless we have insight into the social and political history of the early two centuries that were instrumental in shaping Islam of the status quo.

### ALIEN INFLUENCES ON THE MUSLIM MIND

Have you ever thought that the *uloom sharei* or the religious sciences which Muslims regard today as the highest branch of knowledge have their roots not in the Qur'anic worldview alone and a number of other factors had a key role in their development? If the supposedly Islamic sciences are the sum total of knowledge why is it so that the upholders of *sharei* sciences fail to produce a better technology for our defense. As for those who devote themselves to exploring the signs of God the religious scholars look down upon them; for according to them they are involved in lesser sciences often associated with some sort of secularity and irreligiosity. The contempt for non-*sharei* sciences drove many of our best minds away from explorations and inventions thereby reducing the entire Ummah into a group of consumers. The so-called religious sciences that comprise today an incomprehensible amount of *fiqhi* literature where revelatory intent is often lost in hair-splitting debates and where for centuries an open-ended discussion about the authenticity of transmitters remains unabated, one wonders whether they really serve any purpose. The first generation of Muslims had certainly no access to the compendiums of *fiqh* or the books of *rijal*, nor were they aware of exegetical manoeuvring, or dreamt of getting to the hidden meanings of the text. For them Qur'an was a book of guidance in plain and simple language. God had conveyed to them what He wanted to, leaving nothing for the clergy to interpret. The first generation of Muslims hardly knew of alien terminologies such as *fardh*, *wajib*, *nafil*, *sunnah*, *mubah*, *mustahab* etc. The Qur'an created a rational mind urging the faithful to reflect on the cosmic wonders. The natural world was declared a subject of study for all those seeking knowledge. And those astounded by the signs of God were called real scholars. This was the original Qur'anic paradigm of knowledge and signposts for future revolution. Had the Muslim mind operated within this paradigm the study of natural sciences would certainly have come to us as a religious obligation. But unfortunately owing to the political instability and the infiltration of alien ideologies the Qur'anic worldview could not remain intact for long.

How it all happened needs serious investigation. The civil strife that had engulfed the entire world of Islam after the murder of the third Caliph was a congenial



atmosphere for all those who wanted to dilute the divine message. From this period onward, we see the sudden emergence of a host of public entertaining intellectuals, the *qassas* and pseudo-scholars of prophetic traditions who wanted to change Islam from within. Such an attack was more dangerous than the armed rebellions of the Bedouin tribes. Omer II was aware of the sensitivity of Hadith literature and hence he made a concerted effort to compile the authentic traditions to distinguish them from the fabricated ones. But the short span of Omer's rule did not allow him to accomplish this great intellectual project. The ideological infiltration through the backdoors of history continued and it was entirely on the individual scholars of the time to address this issue. Much has been written about how to distinguish the true traditions from the false ones, however, almost none of our great scholars has realised that the very development of *sharei* sciences owes much to the social milieu and is not the product of a planned activity. This abrupt and unplanned development of knowledge in Islam later had a devastating impact on the Muslim mind. The division of knowledge into *sharei* and non-*sharei* sciences, or into Islamic and secular, not only created a social role for the clergy it also blocked the emergence of scientific and rational thinking among Muslims. It was a major paradigm shift, changing the direction of the Ummah forever.

A religion for all time and every place as Islam claims to be, nevertheless, it had to make its beginning in a tribal set-up. The early generations of Muslims were aware of the limitations of a tribal polity as they tirelessly worked to transform their political set-up to suit the demands of the divine message. In their efforts to broaden their socio-political horizon they did not hesitate to learn from the existing models. As the empire went on expanding, at times their own previously held positions came under scrutiny. Omer I is reported to have altered many previously held decisions of the Prophet's time. At times this resulted in a blatant moratorium of some of the *nass* explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Suspension of the Qur'anic *hadd* of amputating one's hand for theft, or denying goodwill amount (*mu'allifatun quloob*) to the neo-converts, or confiscating conquered land in favour of the state are some of the well-known decisions of Omer I. When Omer I was taking a stance different from the one stipulated in the text or when he was altering a prophetic precedent on a specific issue, he knew it well that sanctity is not for any specific judgement or a period of history, rather it is for the 'intent' and spirit of the message. This creative approach to the text made it possible for the early generation of Muslims to benefit from other existing models of statecraft. They would hardly reject anything simply because it had its roots in an alien civilization. Take for example the 'war of trench' on which

depended the very survival of the Ummah. Digging a trench for the protection of the city was alien to the Arab mind. But they showed no reservation in accepting this Persian technique. As long as Muslims displayed a creative openness towards other nations and their collective heritage, they greatly benefited from them. However, the early centuries of Islam had also witnessed a large-scale conversion of the Jewish and Christian ulema who had an established tradition of religious studies and who had brought along with them an entire methodology of religious interpretation. As long as the creative minds and great visionaries of Islam remained in command, the simplicity of Islamic interpretation was maintained. Omer I openly discouraged the birth of a *Mishnah* or compilation of any apocryphal material. However, in later years, especially in the days of *fitna* things changed drastically. And it was here that the things went wrong.

By the end of the first century hijra, a new breed of Islamically oriented public entertainers known as the story-tellers (*qassas*), the transmitters of traditions (*huffaz*) and the popular preachers (*wae'z*) appeared on the scene. As days went by, memoirs of the Prophet's time became a serious concern for historiographers. Initially, these memoirs had emotional and historical import but gradually they were also taken as sources for religious legislation. By the mid-second century hijra they were taken as a rather authentic exposé of the Qur'anic intent. The early *qassas* and *huffaz*, in their efforts to recreate the prophetic era in detail, employed all available sources, from the text to popular anecdotes, and from the authentic traditions to the less authentic reports. A proper methodology to this effect was underway as often the roles of *huffaz* and *qassas*, *mufassirun* and *mutasawwefin* overlapped. Mohammad bin Idris al-Shafei was the first scholar who through his methodical writings on *fiqh* paved the way for a future generation of specialists and it was mainly due to his efforts that Islamic interpretation became the monopoly of the learned few. Shahab Zahri who appears at the close of the first century as a towering personality was no legislator. It took almost another hundred years to look at simple memories of the Prophet's time as sources of Shariah. The publication of *Al-Risalah* was a turning point in the intellectual history of Islam. Hence onward interpretation of Islam had to become monopoly of the clergy. The new clergy would not have claimed the sole right to interpret God's intent had the later scholars not conceived knowledge divided into two distinct categories, the *sharei* and non-*sharei* sciences, the former being the sole prerogative of the ulema. Thus, began the Vaticanization of Islam. Lending credence to some susceptible reports the ulema of Islam even claimed to be the deputies of the prophet and repositories of all prophetic knowledge. The idea that some knowledge was Islamic and some non-Islamic

or some was useful while the others had little utility was a bone of contention in the Abbasid Baghdad when Greek logic and philosophy had created a stir in the intellectual capital of Islam. While this division helped curb the influence of Greek sciences, nevertheless, it also sent the rational thinking to a permanent exile outside the boundaries of *sharei* knowledge. Even a major portion of the Qur'an that urges Muslims to explore and take command of the natural world went beyond the scope of *sharei* sciences. The upholders of *sharei* knowledge or supposedly the super sciences were guilty of suspending a major part of the revelation as their focus lay on the verses of *ahkam* alone. This brought the Muslim mind to a blind alley from where it has yet to be rescued despite the elapse of some twelve centuries.

In Islam the development of *sharei* sciences had an abrupt start. They were more products of a chaos than of a proper planning. The main reason for this intellectual anarchy was the political instability or the internal feuds that had plagued the Muslim world since Caliph Osman's murder. As the institution of khilafa had collapsed and a dynasty had taken control of the situation, the priority of the new rulers was to seek legitimacy for their governance rather than safeguarding Islamic ideology. The exponents of *sharei* sciences and the transmitters of prophetic traditions were willing to lend their support to the new dynasty. They would often relate that the Prophet had asked to obey the ruler even if he was a tyrant. The system that sought legitimacy from the new emerging clergy was certainly not in a position to hold them in check.

By the mid second century the *huffaz* attained such a social prominence that an entire populace would come to greet them when they visited a town. Such honours of mammoth public receptions were not extended even to the rulers. Reminiscing the days of the Prophet had an emotional appeal. It is said when these *huffaz* held their *majlis*, thousands of people joined them noting down each and every word they uttered. By the third century hijra, Hadith emerged as the main discipline of knowledge and one's scholarship was judged by the number of traditions that one had committed to memory. Scholars of Hadith openly vied with each other in claiming to have more *thulathi* (traditions with a chain of three transmitters) and *ruba'ei* (a chain of four transmitters) than anyone else had. Later, when compilation of knowledge became a norm and book writing came in vogue, number of volumes became the criterion of scholarship rather than the quality. A certain scholar claimed that he could write volume after volume just to enlighten the various shades of meaning in *bismillah*. While yet another scholar claimed that he could produce as much as seven camel loads just to explain the dot of the letter *ba* of *bismillah*. What became important was the number of volumes one produced and not the quality of the content. Tabari, whose

major writings have survived to our time, proudly tells that the thirty volumes of his *tafseer* are in fact a summary of the original that he wrote in 300 volumes. And Bukhari, who lists some more than 4000 traditions under various headings, claims that he has selected them out of 0.6 million traditions known to him. Abuzar'a is yet another example who is said to have memorised 0.7 million traditions. Today, we have neither access to the 300 volumes of Tabari nor have we any means to verify the tall claims of Bukhari and Abuzar'a. But the fact that the amount of writing was the criterion of judging one's scholarship can easily be discerned from even a cursory look at our heritage literature. Sayuti (849-911 AH), the famous author of *Al-Itqan*, claims in his preface that his encyclopaedia of the Qur'an has incorporated everything on the topic and that he has extracted all useful material from all available sources. Extracting everything from the past masters and incorporating each available information without a proper evaluation was the norm of religious writing that can be seen from Tabari down to our time. The *ummahat-ul kutub*, or the heritage literature as we call it today, soon became a source of religious disputes. As critical evaluation of the past masters was not the norm, the ulema felt content on writing their commentary to justify their respective schools of thought. Soon writings on the margins or adding copious notes to a text itself became a criterion of scholarship. We have great scholars down the ages writing margins on the margins or further elaborating these explanatory notes. Then, we witness a reversal of the trend, great scholars preparing summaries of great works. Some of these summaries became so puzzling that a host of later scholars took the task of elaborating them further. This never-ending cycle went on and on because there was a general consensus, rather a mindless belief, among Muslims that the great masters of the past had perfected the process of thinking for us and that we were too humble to engage with the revelation on our own.

The *sharia* sciences that abruptly began and chaotically developed have been the root cause of intellectual anarchy and internecine conflicts. Not only the very nomenclature of *ilm sharei* speaks of a flawed vision, the way these *sharei uloom* developed into major disciplines is greatly flawed. Let us briefly summarise:

- Islamic sciences as we know them today as *tafseer wa ta'weel*, *jirh wa tadeel*, *rawayat wa dirayat*, *usool al-fiqh*, *mantiq wa falsafa*, *urooz wa balaghat* etc were not found in their present form during the Prophet's time.
- The political instability emanating from the murder of the third caliph and the internecine conflicts provided a congenial atmosphere for the popular preachers and story-tellers. As the system drew its legitimacy from less authentic reportage, the *qassas* culture flourished. In this intellectually volatile situation, it was easy for

the pretenders and fabricators to get mixed with the genuine scholars. We should not lose sight of the fact that early centuries were not only the time when the pious elders lived amongst us; the same period is also notorious for fake ulema and fabricators.

- The sudden emergence of *huffaz* on the social and intellectual scene was mainly due to the socio-political situation of the time. For the ruling elite *huffaz* (scholars of traditions) were more relevant than the *qurra* (scholars of the Qur'an) as they can put forward a supporting tradition from the vastly unknown amount of historic material. Later scholars who came under the delusion that historic material or reportage constituted the core of Islamic knowledge failed to notice the blatant political factors that surrounded its development.
- The encyclopaedic collection of Hadith and their thematic listing – as we find in *Bukhari*, or preserving the history of first generation of Muslims as a model for future – as we find in *Mua'tta* of Malik, or laying down some basic principles to draw inference from the text – as we find in Abu Hanifa, or formulating a well thought out methodology to reach an agreeable consensus within the ambit of text and tradition – as we find in Shafei, all such efforts were the personal initiatives of these great scholars. They were not commanded by God to do so, nor can their individual efforts form as the intellectual basis of Islam. The great scholars or imams whose works have come down to us were not the only people involved in intellectual activity. History records many great luminaries of Islam whose works were lost in course of time. But it never occurs to us that without them our knowledge of Islam is incomplete. Why do we believe then that the great masters of the past whose works have somehow come down to us are indispensable sources of Islamic knowledge and without them we cannot envision an authentic Islamic living?
- The canonization of four *fiqhi* schools in sunni Islam and that of the imamate in sh'ie Islam which many of us have come to believe as God-ordained were in fact products of political situations of the time. Had Sultan Baibars (658-676 AH) not accorded state patronage to these four schools, the four imams and their followers would have met the same fate as the followers of Sufian Thawri and imam Auza'ei. In their time, Thawri and Auza'ei enjoyed mass following, probably more than any of the four, but now we find their names mentioned only in history books. Baibars' decision to accord official status to these four schools was basically

to quell the internal feuds and it was his personal initiative. A sultan's whim should not let control our destiny.

- The *uloom sharei* as we conceive them today is a false metaphor as they have no foundation whatsoever in the Qur'anic text. They in fact do not appear *sharei* if we put them under strict Qur'anic scrutiny. Intellectual blurredness of the past should not block our vision for the future.
- The narrow conception of *ilm sharei* has been the main factor in driving the Muslims away from scientific knowledge. Those who remained involved in scientific investigations were not only viewed as satellites of alien civilizations they even themselves came to believe that instead of opting for the holy sciences they had chosen a branch of little salvafic value. As the exponents of *uloom sharei* claimed monopoly of Islamic understanding, it was difficult for a less pious scholar to challenge their pious whims in the light of revelation and reason.
- The *sharei* scholars consider some 500 verses of the Qur'an as *ayat ahkam*, which according to them are the bedrock of *uloom sharei*. This fragmented approach to the text has virtually placed most part of the Qur'an outside the boundaries of *sharei* studies. Considering the verses of exploration and invention as not so essential for salvation was a fatal mistake on the part of the scholars of the time and hence it need not be held sacred by future generations.

These are some of the facts that point to our ideological dilution through the ages and which though have their roots in socio-political conditions of the time are now generally taken as the authentic face of orthodoxy. This ideological waywardness has been instrumental in changing our worldview – from inquisitive to ritualistic, and in holding back a prospective movement for scientific exploration in Islam. It was mainly due to this ritualistic mindset that the social sciences which otherwise should have flourished as para-Qur'anic disciplines remain underdeveloped. Many a reformer in the past who had only some vague sense of our intellectual rottenness vociferously called for a return to the Qur'an. But so strong was the pressure of orthodoxy that even those who tried hard to make a dent in traditional thinking or throw out the yoke of canonized *fiqh*, ended up only as extensions of their respective *fiqhi* schools. Today it is possible to have a fresh and independent reading of the Qur'an, more than ever before, as we no more have a central religious authority to guard the orthodoxy. In the past, it was possible for a *shaikhul Islam* to close down the *Darul Funoon* – a modern university in Ottoman Turkey, as in his opinion it fell outside the purview of *uloom sharei*. Today the yoke of traditional mind is not so oppressive.

The time for a new start has eventually arrived. But before we move ahead, we need to think hard why we lived content with our self-orchestrated delusions about *uloom sharei*, and for so long. The Qur'an is an open invitation to think, ponder and reflect on the signs of God found everywhere in the natural world. Igniting the rational faculty is the first step of getting connected. Reason and revelation together constitute a perfect equilibrium, an organic whole. This is the essence of Qur'anic message which enjoins upon the believers to look at the entire book as one single whole. On the contrary, a fragmented approach to the text that picks up only some verses as the commanding verses (*ayate ahkam*) can often make us guilty of upholding half-truths, so explicitly condemned in the Qur'an:

﴿أَفْتَوْمُنُونَ بَعْضَ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا  
خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ﴾ [2:85]

As the development of knowledge, which has a direct bearing on our worldview, has been abrupt, unplanned and flawed we need to move through our heritage literature with utmost care and if possible, get rid of it as quickly as we can. This intellectual breakthrough alone can herald a new beginning and ensure us a return to the seat of authority and guidance.

# Where is Enlightenment?

For the last three centuries the West has been living with an illusion of Enlightenment. Writing in 1784, when *Sapere Aude!* appeared to many as the most fashionable motto to celebrate reason triumphant, Kant was well aware that his was an Age of Enlightenment and not an 'Enlightened Age'. Enthused with the general optimism of the time as he was, he saw – in the alluring freedom under Frederick, obstacles to Enlightenment 'gradually diminishing', shackles of 'self-imposed immaturity' finally being broken and above all, a clear assurance for mankind to rise above barbarism. For Kant and other philosophes of his ilk Enlightenment was a metanarrative where rational thinking was destined to produce a new civilizational utopia. Hence onward, in the succeeding centuries, the struggle to create an entirely Man-centred world intensified. Initially it appeared that a new alternative world was possible. The birth of democracy in the aftermath of French revolution, the discovery of more continents than those mentioned in the Bible, the replacement of biblical static view of the earth-centred universe with a yet evolving view about the cosmos and above all, rapid inventions and industrialization empowered Man with an unflinching confidence in himself. This optimism however was short lived. The latter half of the nineteenth century was marred by scepticism of all kind; as deism finally evolved into atheism and intellectual landscape became ripe for such future isms as nihilism, structuralism and existentialism etc. With the horrors of two world wars and Nazi experimentations at Auschwitz, faith in Man's goodness further deteriorated. Today at the dawn of the 21st century when the Bush Administration has thrown upon us 'war on terror' as a new metanarrative we are faced with an Enlightenment winter. Is a new dark age descending on us? Who is really turning the light off?

Enlightenment narrative as it evolved in Europe was inherently a flawed concept. By sending God to a perpetual exile Man had overburdened himself. As he rejected myths or accumulated wisdom he could only feel isolated, finding virtually nothing to hold on. In a universe where the Creator had left after creating it, as most of the first-generation Enlightenment thinkers believed, it was too heavy a burden for man to find



meaning. Despite so much credit to Enlightenment which created a whole new world around us and which radically altered western worldview for ever, here intellectual challenges always left a void. It was as if man was pitted against an infinite cosmos. Probably, it was too much for Man. Nietzsche toyed with the idea of a superman and by doing so he fell prey to the same age-old myth of a super-human messiah. Unlike the biblical messiah, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was not to descend from the sky, it had to be created right here on this earth. But both the propositions made at least one thing clear; that man was no match for the enormity of the problem.

When Rene Descartes came up with the proclamation *cogito ergo sum*, 'I think, therefore I am' he was sounding a paradigm shift; hence onward man rather than God had to be the focal point around which everything would revolve and human reason had to serve as the foundation of future knowledge. This coronation of man as the chief deity, once lauded as Enlightenment's major achievement, later became its bane. As man became the locus of this new civilization human perception was now reduced to a mere cluster of 'a priori' and 'posteriori' leaving no room at all for any revelatory wisdom. Instead of an omnipotent God now everything had to centre on Man who was the ultimate yardstick. Thus, the new religious sensibility was termed as Humanism and the new polity was canonised as democracy.

But Man was no fixed or standardised canon. Any polity built on him was doomed to be vulnerable. Democracy never delivered what it promised. It always remained fragile and shaky; at times justifying colonialism, genocide and even weapons of mass destruction and nuclear annihilation. Worse still, in a postmodern world which saw the metanarratives virtually redundant thus leaving for us no valid myth to cling to, the very being in Man perished and the new barbarians were born. The death of God eventually led us to the death of Man. And it is against this background that the difference between democracy and fascism, traditionally taken as two opposite poles, faded. Democracy has often resulted in plutocracy, dynastic rule, military dictatorship and even fascism which in turn revert to democracy. In essence, aren't they all the celebration of man?

Instead of a life-giving futuristic attitude that the enlightenment was intended to shape, today we are confronted with a situation where man is not so much afraid of the supernatural but of his own destructive potential. Three centuries of our collective disaster ranging from colonialism to brute oil-wars of today, which 'civilised' nations have camouflaged as war on terror, clearly indicate that Auschwitz and Hiroshima were no aberrations but very logical corollary of our 'enlightened' intellectual outlook. Today with the arrival of postmodernism, anti-Enlightenment ideas of that German

giant, Fredrick Nietzsche – whose arch heir has been Derrida, is on the march again. Nietzsche – whose *Übermensch* plays a key role in his future utopia and who sympathised with the annihilation of the weak, was not only the Nazi regime's official philosopher and an intellectual powerhouse for Mussolini but still holds sway with postmodernists. Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze were inspired by Nietzsche's nihilistic philosophising about truth, morality and beauty. And their considerable success in altering the meaning of the text or at least making the meaning move out of the text and yet claiming that there is nothing outside of the text (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) was the most devastating blow of all time. It had cast a shadow on the language itself, the very tool of our thinking and philosophising.

The Enlightened Age that Kant and many others believed would dawn one day as a result of their sole reliance of reason, never came to a full bloom. Instead, today we find people complaining of the tyranny of reason or 'logo-centrism', as Derrida puts it. Enlightenment's waywardness, rather its leap in the wrong direction has brought us to a complete mess. Deconstruction's vogue has left us not with any meaningful void but an utter confusion about values. Apparently, Derrida may sound pleading for individual freedom when he says: 'general maxims – be they moral, constitutional, or legal – are intrinsically incapable of doing justice to the specificity of the individual case,' but implications of such utterances create tremor in the very foundation of our common values and even legitimise, to some degree, political existentialism of the Bush Administration. If no set of moral conduct or constitutional norms is capable of doing justice and if one unethical political move can be as good as the other well considered moral action, aren't we legitimising everything from Auschwitz to Abu Gharib and to Guantanamo?

The inherent contradictions in western Enlightenment that have been active over the centuries have come to fruition in our age. Some perceive it as the dimming of the enlightenment or consider it as a temporary eclipse. Yet those aware of the full magnitude of the mess that we are in, the ultimate triumph of plutocracy and of corporate capitalism, the end of individual choice in the madly globalising world, the media generated and controlled blindness, mindless exploitation of natural resources to the extent of threatening the future of our only earth, the looming danger of nuclear annihilation and at the top of all a complete absence of any effective leadership who can turn the ever rising tide, rightly conclude that a new Dark Age is fast descending on us.

The moral consensus in the modern West has come to a complete collapse. On one plane, we live in a world which can boast of longevity of life due to advances in

medicine, mass transportation, space journeys, laser-guided weapons, unmanned planes, computers and the internet. But on the other plane, empty lives are asking more than ever before, 'what is the use?' Who has stolen our sweet world, they ask? There are plenty of New Age gurus and Kabala centres out to fix the problem. Then, we have a number of cults assuring us a safe exit to heaven. Many have already taken up their journeys and yet many others are still perplexed about their future. Are we on a fast-track to a culture of mass suicide?

Adorno and Horkheimer are only partially true when they complain that reason has become irrational. Given the enormity of the situation, probably too much is expected from poor reason alone. It is a mind-boggling situation when mind can behave only frantically. When people lose hope they look for short-cuts and magic wands. Superstition becomes the norm and unreason governs our actions. It is precisely this situation that today we find ourselves in. Let me further elaborate.

### UNREASON

The Enlightenment fathers intended to save us from what they perceived as 'self-imposed immaturity'. Man was supposed to take his affairs into his own hands independent of a master, guru or clergy. This exercise in intellectual empowerment however has been a grand failure as we see today biologically grown-up men and women look for professional healers and snake-oil vendors. Modern snake-charmers style themselves as life-style gurus, be-happy consultants, parenting coaches, makeover guides, spiritual healers and mentors. They are the new *shuyukh* or spiritual seers of our Age of Unreason. They invade almost every aspect of our life telling us how to see, how to think, and even how to feel. From art of dressing to reading a book and from meeting a friend to casting a spell on your beloved, they claim to have a ready solution. They teach us the 'art of living'. Yes, for them, it is an art of living on our vulnerability as the New Age gurus have amassed huge wealth and this farce has now developed into a multi-billion industry. For example, in the US, Deepak Chopra's annual revenue crosses \$20 million and in the UK, the female feminist guru Gina Akers charges as much as £2,000 for a consultation. Then we have high profile Kabala centres with celebrities like Madonna, Elizabeth Taylor, Ashton Kutcher, Britney Spears and Demi Moore as their clients. They believe that Kabala water can cure diseases and wearing a Kabala bracelet can seal in all the positive energy and ward off negative vibes or the evil eye.

Hollywood stars alone are not to be blamed for their obsession with unreason. We have otherwise sophisticated policy makers and even heads of powerful governments

who wait for the nod of their spiritual seers. Former US President Ronald Reagan's reliance on astrology is well known. His official diaries were arranged and re-arranged as per the advice of his astrologer. It is on record that at the time of Geneva summit in 1985 he asked his astrologer Joan Quigley to check the star-chart of Gorbachev to anticipate his likely behaviour. The Clintons too never felt shy of their frequent hooking up with self-help gurus. President Clinton's brainstorming sessions with Hollywood mystic Marianne Williamson and management guru Anthony Robbins and Stephen Covey are no secret. Hillary was especially known for her heavy reliance on Jean Houston who styled herself as 'sacred psychologist'. Then we have Tony and Cherie Blair who underwent a re-birthing ritual in 2001 during a Mexican holiday. As they undertook a perfumed mud-bath smearing papaya and watermelons on each other they were expecting the birth of a 'new you' – a popular claim of the New Age healers. In India, the traditional abode of god-men, it is a routine that ridiculous beliefs become a matter of concern. Some years ago, the situation took an interesting turn when soothsayers suggested that outgoing Prime Minister Narasimha Rao vacate his official residence on 10th of June while it was supposed to be auspicious for the new prime minister to move in on the 6th. Superstition dictated that both of them share the same residence to avoid evil influence. Esoteric sciences that were rejected even in the Middle Ages by sensible individuals are now marketed as holistic, alternative, spiritual healing, re-birthing etc and there is no dearth of gullible individuals ever-willing to buy them.

When reason dims unreason takes over and that is the beginning of a catastrophe. Today anything goes in the name of New Age metaphysics; from occult to Wicca, from witchcraft to Satanism and from animism of all sorts to the debunked paganism of the ancient past. Can we ignore the historical fact that the Nazis were also a product of occult and unreason? They frequently held occult rituals at Wewelsburg castle – the centre of the knights of the SS, and believed in the supremacy of the Aryan race which according to their belief fled the Atlantis when the third moon crashed. They even launched a search for the Atlantis and the Holy Grail. Like Nazis of the past, the New Age healers are also tech-savvy and they can successfully mix myths with technology to create disasters. Shoko Asahara experimented his vision of salvation by introducing poisonous gas into a Tokyo subway and Marshal Applewhite, leader of the Heaven's Gate cult, was successful in sending a couple of dozen of his followers to a trip on the Hale-Bopp comet. And very recently, President Bush's unfounded belief in his chosenness, as one who has been assigned to promote democracy and freedom, has resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of innocent lives in Iraq, Afghanistan and

other places. Are we amidst a catastrophe or it is just the beginning? Carl Sagan has an insider's insight:

I have foreboding of an America in my children's or grand-children's time ... when awesome technological powers are in the hands of a very few, and no one representing the public interest can even grasp the issues; when the people have lost their ability to set their own agendas or knowledgeably question those in authority; when, clutching our crystals and nervously consulting our horoscopes, our critical faculties in decline, unable to distinguish between what feels good and what's true, we slide, almost without noticing, back into superstition and darkness'.

*(The Demon-Haunted Worlds)*

### SUPERSTITION

Unreason begets superstition. Not long ago in 1995, India which styles herself as the superpower in waiting was taken over by a wild frenzy of milk miracle. Sensible and educated individuals thronged to the nearby temple to witness the drinking of milk by clay idols. Rationalists and scientists had to debate long hours on electronic media to expose this farce. In Hyderabad, the cyber city of 21st century India, when there was a solar eclipse people were looking for safe confines. Pregnant women were tense and according to some newspaper reports (*The Hindu*), some grandmas even prevented them from scratching their bodies lest the new born develop scars.

That superstition is on the rise the world over can also be gauged by the increasing popularity of funny pages in the print media. Newspapers publish a horoscope page which has no religious or scientific rationale yet according to a 1984 Gallup Poll, 55 per cent of American teenagers believe in astrology. Officially, both Christianity and Judaism have an aversion to astrology. Moses Maimonides considered it 'a disease, not a science' and for Martin Luther 'astrology is framed by the devil', but despite the Judeo-Christian traditions' strong stance, astrological publications and gurus thrive on people's gullibility.

To ward off the effects of evil-eye there has come up a world-class industry in Istanbul which specialises in nicely made crystal amulets. The evil-eye amulet has a global market as it is probably the most popular superstition. The Arabs call it 'ain' and in modern Europe and America a person who looks run down is generally taken as 'over looked', wished or ill-wished. In America it is not unusual to find someone who believes that breaking a mirror can bring bad luck or even death in a family. And it is no secret that American sailors still avoid whistling aboard ship lest it raise a whistling wind. They say: 'whistling girls and crowning hens/ always come to some bad ends'. Some of the superstitions that were successfully wrapped up sometime ago have made

a come back. For example, Reform Judaism had put away long ago ancient practices such as having mezuzah at the door-post or breaking of glass at a wedding. The new generation of reform rabbis is not just reintroducing such practices they even justify them as another way of dealing with anxieties.

When it comes to number 13, the notion of a civilised West evaporates. In Florence, for example, houses between 12 and 14 bear 12 and a half and Italian national lottery purposely avoids number 13 in its tickets. In modern metropolises, high-rise buildings, especially hotels and hospitals, skip the 13th floor. Aeroplanes have no 13th aisles and some airports skip 13th gate. Some even believe that having thirteen letters in one's name can be disastrous or at least a source of intriguing troubles. There are specialised gurus who tell us how to adjust the spelling of our names to avoid the evil effects of number 13.

### TYRANNY

With the transformation of democracy into plutocracy, tyrants are back to business. In recent years, following the American occupation of Iraq, anti-war demonstrations in western capitals made at least one thing clear; that the ruling elite do not represent the will of the people. Recently, in Gujarat (India), the electoral victory of Modi despite international condemnation for his state orchestrated pogrom in 2002 has questioned the very efficacy of the system long held as a civilised means for political change. In the West there is a general feeling that the golden age of democracy is over and now elections are only a camouflage for a system that shrouds itself in secrecy. Today, there are some 700 US military bases across the globe and no one exactly knows what goes on in these camps and what the terms of agreements with the respective governments are in whose territory they are located. In countries that claim to be nuclear powers the citizens have no idea about the number of nuclear warheads in stock, nor do they have any information about biological and chemical weapons. In the wake of 9/11, many governments passed draconian laws, like US Patriot Act and UK Anti-Terrorism Act, which further strengthened the culture of secrecy. Things have come to such a pass that in 2006 the Congress appropriated funds for building concentration camps in the US.

In the US the slide from freedom to tyranny has not gone unnoticed. But neither the opposition nor the public opinion has any role in a system which displays an air of arrogance: truth be damned. This plutocratic culture allowed successive US Presidents to destroy what once was termed as the American Dream. Abraham Lincoln, otherwise known for his democratising hype, significantly curtailed freedom of the press.

Woodrow Wilson was tough on war critics and Roosevelt interned American citizens of Japanese origin. George W. Bush almost wrapped up the Bill of Rights. Dick Cheney – who the former CIA director Stansfield Turner labels as the ‘vice-president for torture’, solved the ethical dilemma of using torture once and for all. In the backdrop of the homophobic nature of torture at Abu Gharib prison, the *New York Times* reported:

This week, Vice President Dick Cheney proposed a novel solution for the moral and legal problems raised by the use of American soldiers to abuse prisoners and the practice of turning captives over to governments willing to act as proxies in doing the torturing. Mr. Cheney wants to make it legal for the Central Intelligence Agency to do this wet work.

*(Editorial, October 26, 2005)*

### THE SIEGE-MIND

That religion is on the rise and God is back in fashion are only illusory if we look at what goes on behind this spiritual smokescreen. We still live in a spiritually barren wasteland where devil rather than God appears shaping our destiny, yet the TV evangelists through their digital blitz of live telecasts of beautifully arranged church rituals, impressive liturgy of Catholic masses and round the clock religious channels make us believe that the Age of Faith is back again. Televangelists like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and R. Albert Mohler even preach that the Bible is inerrant word of God. They are either unaware of biblical criticism of the last two hundred years or arrogantly ignore it. Some of them even claim to have achieved direct communication with God and assert that they can relieve us of our pain and suffering through their ‘holy solution.’ Are they driving us back to an age when paying tithe was the most effective way of getting rid of ancestral demons, curses and evil-spells?

It is no spiritual revival but the religious faddism and spiritual bankruptcy of the worst kind. Instead of the inspiring words of gospel, the neo-Christians of our time are interested in the Bible codes, dream interpretations, occult wisdom, aura and Nostradamus. Religious bookstores are full of such books that tell us how and when the author encountered demons or angels who were moving, not from left to right, but from bottom to top. Mind you, they are serious books meant for adults and not Harry Potter stories for children. Desperate junkies are even turning to the Bible as a book of alternative medicine. There is an ever-growing craze for esoteric solutions. All sorts of nonsense go in these books. Recently, I came across Mark Bubeck’s *Spiritual Warfare Basics* – a harrowing and depressing guide for esoteric adventures that teaches people how to pray to God that He may search their sexual organs, blood, bones, hair, skin and even cells for demon activity. Such things may not have even a remote connection

with the Bible but they have a ready market among the religiously inclined. People who could claim to have a vision of God might have diminished in the Muslim East but they are constantly on the rise in the modern West. Kathryn Riss is one of those poetic seers who claim to have received this song directly from ‘the Lord’:

If you feel too serious and kind of blue  
 I've got a suggestion, just the thing for you!  
 It's a little unconventional, but so much more fun,  
 That you won't even mind when people think you're dumb!  
 Just come to the party God is throwing right now,  
 We can all lighten up and show the pagans how  
 Christians have more fun and keep everyone guessing,  
 Since the Holy Ghost sent us the Toronto Blessing!  
 I used to think life was serious stuff  
 I wouldn't dare cry, and I acted kind of tough  
 Until God's Spirit put laughter in my soul,  
 Now the Holy Ghost's got me and I'm out of control!  
 Now I'm just a party animal grazing at God's trough,  
 I'm a Jesus Junkie, and I can't get enough!  
 I'm an alcoholic for that great New Wine,  
 'Cause the Holy Ghost is pouring, and I'm drinking all the time!

(Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997, pp. 245-246)

Dare to question this siege-mind religiosity? Western culture today is a paradoxical mix of inquisitional mentality and unconcerned self-abstinence. Doubting almost everything so as to improve, or at least to know – once the hallmark of post-Enlightenment western mind – has been effectively eroded by the wind of faith blowing in the postmodern West which prefers to create its own reality. And the triumph of inquisitional mentality or neo-conservatives has played a vital role in creating an atmosphere of terror where thinking and rational arguments are effectively suppressed. In his State of the Union address 2006, George Bush appeared no less than inquisitional: ‘Tonight I ask you to pass legislation to prohibit the most egregious abuses of medical research: human cloning in all its forms, creating or implanting embryos for experiments, creating human-animal hybrids, and buying, selling, or patenting human embryos.’

Such zealous pronouncements only make us feel as if we are back to the time when Christian Church condemned Galileo. Those who oppose this inquisitional mind



and advocate for a culture of techno-science and rational values are equally guilty of placing science in the position of deity. They are not against unreason as such; they are more for a thorough demystification of the mystery that man is. Theirs is a tall order: alleviating hereditary diseases by removing defective genes from sperm and eggs; solving social problems or even making breakthroughs in criminal investigation by one's genetic code; assessing one's candidature for a suitable position on the basis of his genetic profile; or even getting some insight about hereafter through 'near-death' brain mapping and further possible explorations in neuro-science. Whether we will be able to create flawless supermen in the future remains to be seen, but if the world is really four dimensional, as the exponents of Special Theory of Relativity claim, and the future already exists, we come to a closed circle. Not much can be done. Rather, nothing can be done. We come to a dead-end; back to the centuries old oppressive theological debate about freewill and determinism. This sort of irresponsible scientism cannot rescue us from the dark abyss that we have slipped into, nor Heidegger, Foucault or Derrida or postmodernism can shield us for long. Reason must be engaged and mystery should not be euphuism for troubled water, nor should meaning be suppressed or imposed. But this cannot be achieved unless we deconstruct the Enlightenment narrative.

# Is a new Enlightenment Possible?

*The blind and the seeing are not alike,*

*Nor are the depths of the darkness and the Light,*

*Nor are the (chilly) shades and the (genial) heat of the sun.*

*(Al-Qur'an, 35: 19-21)*

One of the curses of modern times is the mirage of perceptions. In a world of media generated illusions, man is denied the right to know, to see the things as they are. And this has led us to a total unmindfulness of the mega-crises that we live in today; the ecological threat to our planet earth and the virtual zombification of man at the hands of the capitalist monster called 'Globalization'. Man is in chains again but this time the shackles around him are not so visible. Earlier a similar situation would have caused the arrival of God's prophets to bestow on mankind the Light (of Revelation) enabling them to see the things as they are: اللهم أرني الأشياء كما هي

The prophets of God are endowed with an extraordinary Light and vision. Those who follow them are entrusted with a new worldview or so to say experience a paradigm shift. This journey from Darkness to Light, as the Qur'an puts it, makes the blind see and fills a dispirited soul with a new vigour of life. The hibernated human society lying low for long has witnessed time and again a renewal of life with the arrival of messengers of God. The story of Jesus as related in the Qur'an is one such instance when a prophet of God makes the spiritually blind see and brings the spiritually dead back to life. Those living on a mere material plane, unaware of noble ideals of life, undergo such a thorough transformation that they feel less linked to earth than heaven. The Qur'an uses the parable of a bird originally made out of clay which due to a spiritual breathing into it, feels like ascending to heaven, the metaphoric abode of spiritualism. Yet at another place in surah Al-Haj, chapter 22: verse 46, we are told that the ability to see things as they are does not depend on our mere sensory perceptions 'for it is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts which are in their breasts':

﴿فَأَيُّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ﴾ [22:46]

Living at a temporal distance of some fourteen centuries when the last Prophet of God lived amongst us, today we may have an uncomfortable feeling that the darkness has again descended on us, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to see through the machinations of modern day media images. It is an image based perception that we so conveniently carry along with us, most of our life, that for many of us seeing is what the camera wants us to see. We go where the camera goes. We have learnt so well to rely on our mere sensory perceptions that the eyes of the heart are not in operation any more. True, there lives an Ummah amongst us that considers itself rightful heir of the last Prophet and claim to uphold the Last Revelation, the cure of our blinded heart—

﴿وَشِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ﴾ [10:57]

but they do not want to open the book themselves and are content to look at the book through the eyes of our pious elders who are long dead and who certainly due to their ignorance of our age are incapable of telling us how to bring this Enlightenment to our context. As the Book of God remains under siege by the centuries old understanding of our Elders, the *salaf*, the Ummah, as also the rest of the world, are doomed to live in darkness taking recourse to a Crusoe-like approach, waiting for a Messiah to come.

Muslims may appear to be a dispirited nation today; they are not alone in their long wait for the messiah. In fact the messiah myth has been causing more havoc in Jewish and Christian circles than anywhere else. Christianity may boast of being the biggest religion on earth today based on the number of its adherents but the fact is that for centuries Christian ideology has been on retreat. From the Catholic faith that once commanded the society to the emergence of Liberal Capitalism, Christianity has compromised a lot, to the extent that it now allows a gay priest in office. In post-Christian West, many of us are rightly pointing out, our journey towards the long cherished human ideals of liberty and freedom has eventually brought us to a situation where we find ourselves at the mercy of Fascist Liberalism. Those who once believed that a free world based on democratic ideals was in offing and that history was travelling fast towards its ultimate end were mistaken. The end of the cold war or the drawing of the iron curtain has brought to focus more of the paradoxes of Capitalism than the disparities of the totalitarian state. Now it is no more difficult to see the inhuman face of Capitalism or what makes the US prosperous and at whose cost. The US is one third of the Indian population and yet it consumes more than one third of world resources. If the Indians aspire for a similar standard of living the rest of the globe will go starving. Sensible people around the world do not support this unethical

proposition. But the yoke of Fascist Liberalism is so powerful that not man alone feels helpless, the Evangelical Capitalism has even pressed God into its service: 'God bless America'.

The world is moving fast towards its extinction. There is no one to rein in the mad pursuit of Fascist Liberalism. There are some murmurs in the East, some small islands of protest but they are not so effective as to pose any threat to the capitalist ideology that has in a way 'globalized' the planet earth. A sense of utter helplessness that once had gripped humanity in Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, then in localised areas, is now prevalent at a global scale.

Nevertheless, this is only one side of the picture. Blaming others for all our woes is neither fair nor can it take us anywhere. Why at all has this happened that the reins of history slipped from our hands and today the entire world, including us, is at the mercy of Fascist Capitalism? This is the fundamental question that we have been shying away from for long and that deserves our serious and urgent attention.

This naturally takes us to another question. An Ummah essentially raised for global leadership and whose sole *ratio legis* was to benefit others, to provide direction and guidance to the entire mankind, how come it too became party to petty mundane conflicts? During the last few centuries the proponents of Islam have envisioned it mainly in a language of resistance. Instead of presenting Islam to the world as a message of peace and mercy and ourselves as benefactors to humanity we took up the task of defending Islam. This conception of Islam in a language of resistance was a clear digression from our designated role which has forced us to take a self-imposed exile from world leadership. We may boast of our selves as Ummah of the last Prophet upholding the Last Revelation, yet in practical spheres we are no longer at the centre-stage. Our traditional Islamic seminaries may make claim of being repositories of Revelatory knowledge yet they do not have much relevance in the modern technological world. The world does not depend on us any more, instead, we depend on them. Our misconceptions about knowledge, i.e., considering the so-called Islamic sciences as sum total of knowledge, has permanently placed us on a slippery slope. Those who want to get rid of this situation and in their religious zeal want to turn the impossible into possible lack a proper methodology. Much of our religious literature and *responsa* of *fiqh* employs a language of resistance, which does tell us how to die for Islam but does not enlighten us as how to live for it. Then there are those amongst us who in their search for a new dawn have taken recourse to western liberal ideals. It is difficult for them to appreciate the language of resistance while on the other hand they themselves are not capable of discovering the Qur'anic paradigm of mercy.

Envisioning Islam as a mere political movement has also made it difficult for us to search for the missing paradigm of mercy. Islam as a political movement, so vociferously launched in our time, mainly focused on the implementation of *shariah* or a revival of life under the great *fiqhi* masters of the past. This conveyed to the wider world as if Islam had nothing new to offer as Muslims were not prepared to approach the Qur'an afresh. The unmindful implementation of the *shariah* (*fiqh*) only brought to the fore a sectarian *fiqhi* vision of the bygone days. In our enthusiasm for the *shariah* we even did not bother to check if the great masters of the past have really embodied the Qur'anic teachings or their formulations were more influenced by their own social settings. Those who wanted to draw legitimacy from the *shariah* for their autocratic governance mainly wanted to put the *shariah* to their service.

The *shariah* as conceived and practiced by the Taliban, or as championed by the sectarian ulema has only convinced us the Islamic movements have yet to come out of the Abbasid era *fiqhi* milieu. It has not yet been possible for them to conceive Islam in other than the language of resistance and present to the wider world the message of Islam in a broader language of common good and God's unfailing mercy. Islam, if conceived in the language of mercy, comes to us as an abode of refuge for all those distressed and broken souls in search of solace while the language of resistance gives birth to sectarian feuds even within the House of Islam. Pakistan, Tunisia, Algeria or Egypt wherever Islamic movements have employed a language of resistance it has deeply divided the Muslim society. The Islamic movement, a twentieth century phenomenon and a result of colonial onslaughts, appears to be a finished phenomenon. And the same is true of the neo-Salafis, once an advocate of creative approach to Qur'an and sunnah, whose dependence on Ibn Taimiyah and Muhammed bin Abdulwahhab has unfortunately brought them to icon worship, or as the Qur'an puts it, to a closed-mind set:

﴿ وَجَدْنَا آيَاتِنَا كَذَّالِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ﴾ [26:74]

Our crisis is two-fold. While the world lives under a constant corrosion of Fascist capitalism the followers of the last Prophet are engaged in fighting their own survival battle. Despite the presence of God's Last Revelation amongst us, our excessive dependence on the human wisdom of the past, on the interpretative works of great masters, we Muslims lack a creative and life-affirming vision of the future. Engaging with the Revelation on our own, for our specific context, is simply unthinkable even by those who otherwise go on preaching a model Islamic state. The Islamic discourse of our time which, in the words of Syed Qutb, places much emphasis on *al-mantiq al-*

*wijdani* has left little scope for any rational or critical enquiry. To use a Kantian expression, this has nurtured amongst us a kind of a 'self-imposed immaturity' in our endeavours to engage with the Revelation. Our vision of the Revelation is that of a past experience that once had shown us our way, some fourteen centuries ago. At most, this is only a part of our historical self, and not a felt experience. We look at the Qur'an as a repository of a great legacy of Light, and not as the Light itself. As a result, for many centuries, the Ummah is on a continuous retreat, journeying backward, from Light to Darkness.

With the darkness comes a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future. Once the Darkness sets in, it can only be remedied by the Light of Revelation:

[2:17] ﴿ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَّهُمْ فِي ظُلْمَةٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ﴾

The nations devoid of Divine Light have to live in constant fear of the unknown:

[2:19] ﴿أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَةٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ﴾

The sudden glimpse of light, instead of showing them the way, blocks their vision:

[2:20] ﴿يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ تَخْطِفُ أَبْصَرَهُمْ﴾

Apparently, it makes them see for a while, and even allows a little aimless drift, but once the light goes off they again come to a stand still. There can't be a better reflection of our situation as captured in this Qur'anic parable.

The gravity of the situation demands from us that our journey backward, from Light to Darkness, is immediately put to a halt. In the past such great tasks were performed only by the prophets. But now as no prophet is to come and the Last Revelation is like a prophet in absentia, it is for us, the followers of Mohammad, to work a new Enlightenment. As long as the Book of God is available amongst us and we have the guts and courage to engage ourselves with it, the possibility of a new Enlightenment cannot be ruled out.

The spiritual darkness that has gripped the entire world today is not idol worshipping or other superstitions. Instead, it is a sort of zombification of man, a casual living that has evolved due to our sheer inability to see the things as they are. The media has never been so powerful and mankind never relied so heavily on continuously bombarding visual images. Prophet Mohammad's prayer, 'My Lord! Show me the things as they are' was never so badly needed. To see the things as they are demands from us that we shun all hang-ups, be they psychological, historical or religious and start depending on our mature self. This in fact needs a full-fledged

Enlightenment, a Divine assistance that leaves no room for any ambiguity as promised in the Qur'an:

﴿ مَا فَزَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ ﴾ [6:38]

However, the Book of guidance and light (فيه هدى ونور) will create a new dawn for us only if we completely forsake worshipping the Elders and, with confidence in ourselves and hope in God's assistance, turn to God and His Revelation; for it is He alone who is protector of the believer and who delivers him from Darkness to Light:

﴿ اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۗ ﴾ [2:257]

And it is He 'who sends His servants manifest signs, that He may lead you from the depth of Darkness into the Light' [57:9]. Today too, if the upholders of the Last Revelation gather courage to engage with the Revelation on their own, they will find in their midst the birth of a new Enlightenment and in this process, they will always find the promised help of God:

﴿ هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۗ ﴾

﴿ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا ۙ ﴾ [33:43]

True, the Ummah may have the feeling of coming to a dead-end or like Prophet Jonah we might find ourselves trapped in the dark and closed belly of a fish knowing not how to get out of the situation, yet a new Enlightenment is always knocking at our door provided that we too, like Jonah (Yunus), have the courage to confide in our Lord:

﴿ فَنادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَن لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ۗ ﴾ [21:87]

# Calling for a Paradigm Shift

At the outskirts of Riyadh, en route to the airport, there lies a huge complex of fortress-like structures. This is the famous Imam University known for higher education in Islamics. The Imam University is not the only seat of learning specialising in Islamic education, or the *uloom sharei* as they call it. There is an equally famous university in Medina as also the famed Al-Azher Shareef in Cairo and a host of such institutions throughout the Muslim world devoted to Islamic learning. The other end of the Saudi capital houses yet another university, the King Saud, which specialises in modern secular education alone. Situated on the two sides of the same city, the two universities help shape entirely different worldviews. This is no exaggeration to say that people on the two campuses live in entirely different worlds. At the Jamia Imam the sum total of knowledge is *ilm sharei*, the religious sciences. Here the secular knowledge holds no legitimacy whatsoever. On the other hand, the scholars at the King Saud believe that they have nothing to do with the religious sciences. This misconception about the very nature of knowledge or its classification into Islamic and un-Islamic has created split personalities among Muslims. Those belonging to the secular stream of education have this awful feeling that their efforts might not be beneficial to them in the hereafter. While on the other hand, scholars in the religious seminaries live under the illusion that they, being religious scholars, are heirs to the Prophet and that they alone are in the possession of true knowledge.

The idea of a full-fledged university for imparting 'Islamic' education though now quite an established tradition, does not conform to the holistic concept of knowledge in Islam. Even before the colonial period our traditional ulema did not believe in such a narrow definition of *ilm sharei*. As long as Muslim empires survived in any form our religious seminaries made it a point to include most contemporary subjects in their syllabus so as to produce competent men for the system. In the famous *dars nizami* (the Nizamia syllabus of the sub-continent that traces its origin in the 18th century) the inclusion of existing books on Logic, Mathematics, Physics etc. is indicative of the fact that the very syllabus that appears to be so irrelevant today wore a modern outlook in its own time. But once the ulema came to believe that after the fall of the Muslim empires the only role left for them was to preserve Islamic heritage and pass on Islamic



understanding to the subsequent generations, a psychology of resistance gripped them. This did not happen in one day. The genesis of this misconception about the nature of knowledge can be traced back to the second century hijra when the ever-widening scope of the newly developed *uloom naqaliyya* – the sciences of collection and critical appraisal of traditions – had attained undue prominence, a point I shall later return to.

The proponents of *uloom sharei* argue that the Muslim society after all needs Moazzins and Imams, scribes and preachers and those experts in Islamic *fiqh* who can teach young boys and girls Islamic etiquette and methods to attain hygienic purity. But to achieve this target do we really need full length courses spanning from ten to fifteen years? However, if our religious seminaries intend to produce such people who can provide able leadership and guidance for the modern world, this certainly cannot be achieved by institutions where a medieval feel is very much part of the syllabus.

What is knowledge? What is the Qur'anic definition of a true scholar (الراسخون في العلم)? Such questions need to be addressed afresh. The one who knows and the one who does not are by no standard on the same footing [39:9]. In the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* revelation and reason are the two basic sources of knowledge. While revelation serves as the guiding light, reason works as the basic tool of analysis. The one complements the other. Those endowed with a pure heart and a sound mind take heed from various signs of God. They reflect on the coming down of rain from the sky, the varieties of colourful produce from the same soil and the colour scheme at work amongst men and animals. The more they reflect and ponder on the universe the more they are astounded by the awe of God. Truly, they are the men of knowledge among His servants, we are told in the Qur'an [35:28].

In the Qur'an the Prophet is the ultimate teacher who recites to the people the verses of divine origin to purify them and to educate them in the Book and wisdom [2:129 & 151]. The very mention of *hikmah* or wisdom as a natural corollary to the Book of God is indicative of the fact that a rational outlook is the key to proper understanding of the Book. What is *hikmah* and why it is so that the Qur'an mentions it alongside the Book and in the same breath? Some of the traditional commentators of the Qur'an have mistaken it as yet another word for sunnah. However, a close reading of all such verses where the word *hikmah* occurs tells us an altogether different story. Unlike sunnah, *hikmah* is not a phenomenon that achieved its perfection and came to an end with the death of the Prophet. Rather, it is an ongoing process of mental alertness. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that testify to this meaning. For example, relating to the story of David we are told that he was endowed with political power and wisdom [2:251]. And Allah grants *hikmah* to whom He pleases [2:269].

That *hikmah* is not to be confused with the Prophet's sunnah can also be deduced from the Qur'anic assertion that earlier nations, the nation of Abraham for instance, were also recipients of *hikmah* [4:54]. In yet another context, Muslims are enjoined to employ *hikmah* and politeness in inviting people to God. In short, in the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* *hikmah* is a rational attitude nurtured in the individual right under the guidance of revelation. Where pure reason fails, it comes to our rescue. Luqman is such a great seer, a perfect blend of the two who finds special mention in the Qur'an. Revelation and reason together thus make a balanced personality, 'a sound heart', as the Qur'an puts it [26:89].

It was this balanced rational outlook that once placed the Ummah on the high pedestal of world leadership. Muslims became instrumental in creating a whole new world founded on rational thinking. In the heydays of Islam, it never occurred to us that as Muslims we were to limit ourselves to the so called *uloom sharei* alone. On the contrary, the first-generation Muslims were not even aware of the term 'Ilm Sharei', which has gained common currency among scholars of our time. In early Islam it was unthinkable that any group of people would claim to be an authority in religious sciences. The ulema, as we know them today with a distinct identity and a dress code were not known to us at least till the end of the first century hijra. Qazi Abu Yusuf is said to be the first *aalim* to help invent a special dress for himself and for the other ulema in the Abbasid courts. Gradually, this special dress with some modifications became the hallmark of our ulema. The same age also witnessed the emergence of great *fuqaha* and *muhaddithoon*. And it was during this period that the *muhaddithoon* attained social and intellectual prominence. As collectors of Prophetic traditions, a fast vanishing discipline, they even commanded more respect than the scholars of the Qur'an. It was during this period that those who engaged themselves in gathering, preserving and transmitting historical reportage of import came to be known as scholars. Later, this misconception about the nature of scholarship paved way for the division of *ilm* (knowledge) into *uloom naqaliyyah* (transmitted knowledge) and *uloom aqaliyyiah* (rational knowledge), the former being the *ilm sharei* having its origin in the divine words and where reason had no role to play. As compared to the transmitted knowledge, the rational knowledge was to be looked down upon as an inferior branch of knowledge and hence all those involved in scientific discoveries were made to carry with them an onus of guilt. Considering the 'transmitted knowledge' (also read *uloom sharei*) as the sum total of knowledge placed the ulema at the helm of affairs, nonetheless, it virtually resulted in the closing of the Muslim mind.

The delusion that Muslims have been living under for quite a long time about the nature of knowledge and that has created havoc in the Muslim mind was until very recently a popular notion among the Jews. For almost two thousand years, long before the sack of the second temple in Jerusalem, the Jewish Rabbis have been preaching that the main purpose of life on this planet is to devote to the Torah studies. Even a trade or a commercial activity is allowed only on the pretext that the money thus earned will be spent on those engaged in religious studies. As for reading a secular book, the Jewish Rabbis considered it a blatant violation of faith. For almost two thousand years the Jewish nation in Diaspora lived under this delusion. However, in the 18th century Eastern Europe, a revolutionary, ground breaking question was put forward by an inquisitive Jew. There are some moments in human living, thus asked the questioner, when it is simply not possible to recite from the Torah or read a religious book, especially when we are in the toilet. Can such odd moments be utilised to read secular literature? The enquirer was trying to find a way out and he got the Rabbi's approval. This was a ground-breaking *responsa*. Soon we find many European Jews complaining of constipation, spending long hours in toilets. In the Jewish quarters where religious elders set the norms of living, toilets became the only safe haven where one could lay hands on books of science and philosophy. And once the taboo was broken it was no longer possible to control the Jewish imagination. In the 19th and 20th centuries we witness a flood of social thinkers, philosophers, scientists and men of letters from among the Jewish nation. In fact, the 20th century owes some of the best Jewish minds for its intellectual build.

The Jewish nation is not a recent phenomenon. They have lived on this planet for centuries. As long as they lived in isolation believing that they can excel in hair-splitting *fiqhi* debates alone, the world did not hear of them. It was not that during the last two thousand years great minds were not born among them. The best among them wasted their energy in debating such 'religious issues' whether it is lawful to flush the toilet on Shabbat or if wearing a wig of natural hair constitutes a breach of faith. But once they had the opportunity to lay their hands on secular knowledge, the same nation produced wonders. The Jewish experience, it so appears, mirrors our own predicament.

Muslim intellectuals in the past were partially aware of the intellectual crises fomented by our delusion about and division of knowledge. Abu Hamid Ghazali, the famous *hujjatul-Islam*, in his monumental work *Ahiya al Uloom* encouraged Muslims to learn Engineering and Medicine so as not to be dependent on non-Muslims. But the idea that true knowledge is holistic, a composite whole of scientific and revelatory knowledge, is yet to gain ground among Muslims. It calls for no half-hearted efforts or patch-up work, rather it demands nothing less than paradigm shift.

# Is Religion all about Rituals?

The Muslim community is going through a deep crisis. The intensity of this crisis can be gauged from the fact that everyone, be he a leader or commoner, is asking the question as to why, despite the presence of the Qur'an amongst us, we cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel. Why the community that was entrusted with the task of leading the world, despite the presence of the Qur'an and the teachings of the scholars and commentators, is going through a deepening ideological crisis? After the trauma of Auschwitz this question had raised its head among the Jews too as to how could God abandon His chosen community to fend for itself? The Jewish scholars and intellectuals asked themselves the question that if the community of Jews was wiped out from the face of earth, then what possible meaning can the history have for them? The Israelites who, for a long time, have been accustomed to live in history are yet to fully recognise the fact that they have been ejected from the seat of authority and guidance. The basic difference between the Israelites and the Muslims is that while the deposition of the former is a divine decision, the deposition of the latter is an historical aberration that can be corrected through recourse to the Last Revelation. However, the irony of the situation is that instead of critically assessing their situation and attempting to light up their path with the help of the Divine Revelation, the Muslims have become prisoners of history. This has made it difficult for them to come to grips with this historical aberration and understand the full extent of their decline.

The world is now going through its worst crisis in history. Enormous changes, not always for the better, have been affected in different countries of the world in the name of development; the unscrupulous way in which different parochial powers have tried to extend their areas of influence has resulted in an uncertain future for the world community. The spoilage of the environment, the accumulation of the wealth of the world in a few hands, the monopoly of multinational companies, the suppression of the freedom of thought through the manipulation of the media and publicity and compelling the people to see and hear what some dominant power or faction wants people to see and hear - these are some of the realities of our time that are difficult to come to terms with. The anti-God stance of the policy makers has turned the world into an atomic furnace. The intellectual and economic resources of humanity are being

used for the destruction of human life rather than preserving it. Under the circumstances, it was expected that the inheritors of the last Divine Revelation would come forward to direct the confused humanity. However, the stark fact is that despite being declared the most favoured community by God, the Muslims are engaged in a struggle for their existence. There is no doubt that the current situation prevailing in the world urgently demands guidance from God-fearing people. If the Muslims, like the other communities, do not show courage to face this challenge, then how can they mark their distinction from other communities as the inheritors of the last Divine Revelation?

Lately, on the occasion of the Parliament of World's Religions, I had the opportunity to travel to Spain and stay on the peak of mount Montserrat in a Christian monastery. Some Sikh religious leaders and a pundit from Manipur were also staying in the same monastery. I saw that the pundit who had got up at the break of dawn engaged in adorning, with utmost care and concentration, his forehead down to his nose with a white pigment, till the time it became apparently visible from his human face that he was indeed a religious leader! On the other side, an old Sikh gentleman was busy arranging a length of cloth, considerably long, with the help of a friend so that he could participate in the World Parliament of Religions like a true Sikh wearing his prominent turban. An extensive array of colourful religious dresses was on display there. The black robes of the Benedictian monks, the *kippah* of the Jews, the white *sarees* of the Brahmakumaris and the Arabian robes and *tarboosh* of some Muslim divines. Some had added the honorific 'His Holiness' before their names, while others insisted on prefixing their names with 'Reverend' or 'Father'. If some were rabbis, others were Maulanas, and some even considered it reasonable to write the word 'Imam' very carefully before their names.

In this assembly of the divines, such insistence on sartorial refinement and its display left one greatly disappointed. I asked the pundit sitting by me the reason for this insistence on the part of the divines on wearing the particular dress of their community in the World Parliament of Religions, as it would accentuate perception of difference among religions. After a lot of argument and debate on the issue, he finally came out with the frank answer: 'People look up to us for direction and guidance. They want to see us as role models, different from the man on the street. It is obvious that all this attention to dress is because of the image that the common people have of us in their minds. Otherwise, what does dress have to do with real piety?' In the perpetuation of this ritual of dress, the pundit alone could not be held responsible. All the leaders had taken great pains in wearing dresses that would distinguish them from common men and project their image of being Godly or religious beyond all doubt, at

the very first sight. The common people would find it difficult to decide whether a human being like them, of flesh and blood, is breathing behind the heavy and impeccable robes, and whether his views can be subjected to scrutiny and analysis.

It is said that when the Roman officials had come to arrest Jesus Christ, it was difficult for them to recognise him as he was sitting with his followers. They had to take the cue from Judas' reverential kiss. Jesus Christ was, after all, a distinguished Prophet. Even the followers of Prophet Muhammad did not like to adopt any artificial means of distinction that would set them apart from the common populace. The visitors to Medina would often express their amazement at the spectacle of Caliph Omer interacting with them wearing an ordinary dress, without any visible trappings of power and the presence of a flattering entourage. The first generation of Muslims greatly valued freedom of thought. They knew very well that everyone is equal before God. The responsibility of leadership or offering guidance to others does not take the leaders beyond the level of common human beings to a holy status. The common Muslims should be assured that they are entitled to put the actions and words of their leaders and scholars under the strictest scrutiny. So much so that even during the course of his Friday sermon a common Bedouin woman dared to disagree with the Caliph of the time. Conversely, leaders and scholars also considered themselves to be ordinary men of flesh and blood and would not like any supra-human epithet or title for themselves. The ordinary Muslims also did not like the idea that they should see people like themselves to be invested with a sacred halo around them. As long as Muslims valued freedom of thought they sought guidance from the pages of the Divine Revelation, and not from their leaders and scholars. The moment scholars and men of letters established the convention of presenting themselves as sacred entities, quite apart from ordinary human beings, and pompous and pretentious spiritual epithets began to be prefixed or suffixed to their names, the Muslim mind began to stagnate and take recourse to blind imitation.

If today, despite the existence of the Qur'an, we cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel, it is due to the fact that we accord greater credibility and honour to *ulema* and *fuqaha* than to the Divine Revelation. Instead of directly accessing the Qur'an and ignite our thinking from it, we consider it necessary to verify whether our stance is corroborated by the sayings of the earlier Islamic scholars. Those who should have been students of the Qur'an have, through different rituals and by adopting impressive titles, transformed themselves into the religious authority. As a consequence, a priestly class among the Muslims has emerged. What could be the reason for this amazing similarity between the religious leaders of the Israelites and those of our own

community? Just as the religious leaders of the Israelites called themselves rabbis, implying that they share Godly attributes, and the Christian priests adopted for themselves the term 'Father' which is appropriate only for God Himself, in the same way, the Muslim religious leaders have adopted the title 'Maulana', a term that has been used in the Qur'an for Allah the Almighty. When communities get accustomed to seeing their religious leaders invested with a halo of sacredness, and when common people begin to believe that there are some individuals among them whose thoughts are sacred and pure and do not admit of scrutiny and correction, then freedom of thought is effectively stifled. In critical moments, such communities fail to find new solutions to their problems and ignite their path with the light of the Divine Revelation. And then all the tasks undertaken in the name of religion result in its negation. Christ's strongest admonition of the Pharisees, the Jewish Maulanas of Christ's time, in the Bible endorses this view. The Qur'anic assertion in the context of the Prophet extending *da'wa* to people that he offered people relief from the tyranny of priesthood was designed to stress the idea that God has not given the monopoly of interpreting religion to a particular class, and that the Prophet's invitation for revolution would not put up with any kind of intervention by rabbis, popes or *Maulanas*. How can true piety and love for God allow that the believers should use epithets and titles exclusive for God, and the assumption of false spiritual authority should extinguish the light of freedom of thought and expression?

## Wither Muslim Identity?

Some forty years ago when Wilfred Cantwell Smith laid his claim on Islam, a claim which Muslims believed to have long patented for themselves, few could realize that by claiming to be a Muslim he was igniting a major ideological debate in the religious hemisphere. Smith was no ordinary Christian. He was a great scholar aware of the entire spectrum of the theological debate in Islam about Muslim identity. And as he believed that the essence of Islamic teachings was submission to God, he felt, perhaps genuinely, that he too, being a devout Christian, was a Muslim per se. For Smith Islam was an attitude of submission and not an ideological badge to put on. Islam as espoused in Mohammadanism was not acceptable to him, nonetheless, it was not possible for him to say in Arabic *lastu bi Muslim*, i.e. I am not a submitter. A God-fearing man as he was, how would he dare say that he was not a submitter or a Muslim.

Smith's era was marked by a post-colonial impulse. Muslims around the world looked at Islam more as an ummatic identity than the universal salvific mission. Smith's claim on Islam therefore then received only a lukewarm response from the ulema of the time. Even his trusted pupil Mushirul Haq who on many occasions deliberated on Smith's definition of Islam always tried to maintain a distance. As a student at the Temple University Mushirul Haq had had the opportunity to see Smith from close quarters and there is no doubt that he was deeply moved by his devotion and piety. But was Smith really a Muslim in the linguistic sense of the term? Clearing the air on this issue was not only a dangerous proposition, for Haq it was a theological dilemma too. By claiming to be a Muslim in Christian tradition, Smith had in fact reignited an age-old debate which Muslim theologians had spearheaded in the early centuries of Islam; what makes one a Muslim, faith or practice?

Measuring one's faith is always fraught with dangers and so any attempt at seeking its definition. *fiqhi* or legal definition of religion can be as misleading and inconclusive as its apparently conflicting manifestations. Almost all the major religions, with the only exception of Islam, are known today with the names that were not originally assigned to them by their founders. Jesus never thought that one day his followers would be called Christians and his salvific mission will be termed as



Christianity. The same is true with Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and other great religions. Most of these terms were coined by the outsiders and hence they do not reflect the essence of these religious traditions.

The early orientalist tried to make sense of Muslim religion in Christian parameters. Initially they called it Mohammadanism. It was quite lately when serious scholars of Islam in the West realized that Islam was no cult of Mohammad as it lay claim of being the continuation of the great Abrahamic tradition. Smith belongs to that enlightened era. He was rather surprised to know that the term Islam used in the Qur'an in a broader sense encompassing all kinds of submitters had been patented by the Muslim nation. Smith was also witness to a fierce battle in Pakistan between the Qadianis and mainstream Muslims over the same issue. In fact, the anti-Qadiani movement had brought the entire identity issue to full focus. As recorded in Munir Commission Reports, the ulema were unable to provide a conclusive and mutually agreed definition of who was a Muslim. If Islam is an attitude and if one's Muslimness depends on his/her submission to God, can Muslims be found outside the traditional House of Islam? This was a natural question that Smith and other serious students of Islam grappled with. For Smith claiming to be a Muslim might have been an intellectual chivalry, but for us any redefinition of the term would certainly cause a paradigm shift.

Who is a Muslim, then? Is Islam a religious patent for the Muslim nation alone or can there be some other equally deserving claimants to this Abrahamic heritage? I think any attempt to provide a conclusive or authoritative answer to this highly complex issue will betray the nature of the question itself. Let me elaborate. The human mind employs language as a tool of thinking and perception. Man has a unique ability to name a phenomenon and this is what distinguishes him from other creatures. But the words as tools of thinking and expression have their own limitations, especially when the words are not dead words, they keep evolving. While on the other hand, for God language is a mere tool of communication. God can no doubt perfectly translate the sublime intent into a human language but then the language will bear divine stamp of perfection making little sense for the humans. To bridge the gap between the divine intent and the human language God does not humanize himself either. Rather, He wants us to appreciate the sublime intent in a humanly comprehensible language: 'Read! In the name of thy Lord whom you owe your existence.' Man is reminded time and again of his lowly origin yet he is encouraged to make his own reading of the text: 'Read! For thy Lord is bountiful'.

﴿ أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿۱﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿۲﴾ أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿۳﴾ ﴾ [96:1-3]

This motivated reading has to acknowledge at the outset that the Qur'an is no ordinary book and that no humanly comprehensible language can fully absorb the divine intent nor any exegete can lay a siege around its meaning. At most what Man can do is to appreciate the thrust of the intent thereby finding a direction for his spiritual journey. On the contrary, if one approaches the text as a legal draft inferring all possible dos and don'ts, it is very likely that he ends up without getting any wiser. The Israelites, we are told in the Qur'an, were asked to slaughter a calf. But instead of obeying the divine command instantly they raised many questions to narrow down their search for a calf. This approach to get to this much of precision is certainly against the hermeneutics of the divine text.

In the Qur'an, a *fiqhi* mind is at a loss to find precise definition to the Muslim identity. Instead, God wants us to be a submitter per se, to be called as people of God (*rabbani*). Here the attitude itself is the identity. Claiming to be a Jew or a Christian is no acceptable propositions. The faithful has to acquire the colour of God as this is the only valid identity: 'the colour of God and whose colour can be better than God's. It is He whom we worship' [2:138]. Schism and *Tawhid* do not go hand in hand. Submitters to God cannot be true in their claims unless they shed their respective group identity to form a universal brotherhood of *rabbani*, the people of God. The Qur'an keeps us reminding, oft and on, that Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob or Moses and Jesus were neither Jews nor Christians. They all belonged to one group of submitters whom the act of submission had given an identity and a name:

﴿ مَلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۗ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ ۗ ﴾ [22:78]

The Qur'anic exhortations such as *كونوا ربانيين*, (be the people of God) and *صبغة الله* (take the colour of God) are enough indications that the Qur'an wants to create a universal society where small group identities are merged to create the universal identity of submission to one God. This universal brotherhood which the Qur'an terms as *Ummah Muslimah* is a broader term encompassing all the prophets and their true followers. The Abrahamic prayer, 'O my Lord raise from amongst us a nation of submitters' does not include those transgressors who otherwise may claim to be his offspring:

﴿ وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُؤْيَاهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ ﴾ [2:124]

﴿ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴾ [2:124]

A redefinition of Muslim identity is no academic luxury for us. In fact on it depends our future. Today, in the twenty first century, when the patented Muslims find themselves on a slippery slope and when the so called revivalist movements appear to be a finished phenomenon, it is high time to do some serious soul searching. Imagine! Yesterday, we were the liberators, upholders of the last salvific mission. Today, we are so helpless that we are unable to arrest our own decline. What has gone wrong with us? How did all this happen? Probably, it requires a lot of courage on our part to be truly self-critical and certainly no less than the bluntness of an idiot to speak it out. True, we claim to be the upholders of a universal mission but in reality, we are no better than the Jews and Christians of the prophet's time. And like them we too, instead of calling people to God, work tirelessly to expand our social base, urging people to convert to our cultural identity. And if that be the case, I wonder, why we expect others to be attracted to such a purely communitarian project.

Unlike the communitarian Muslims of today, the first generation of Muslims were endowed with a universal vision. In their appearance they were like other Arabs of their time; speaking the same language, donning the same kind of dress and sporting a similar beard. But in their outlook, they were citizens of an entirely different world working for a bias-free global society of submitters. Their appearance being the same, Islam had radically transformed them from within. For them accepting Muhammad as the prophet of God meant leaving behind the old world of clan-identity and for that they needed no external face-lift. Despite their intellectual and spiritual transformation, they were not required to dress differently or undergo a name change. In those days there was neither such notion as Islamic names nor any institutionalized process of conversion or specific formula for declaring one's faith as we know it today. Coming to Islam basically meant that the person had thrown his full weight in the camp of Muhammad and joined the prophetic struggle against all odds. Verbal declaration of faith or beautifully constructed rhetorical formulas had little relevance then, as faith was more a matter of deeds than words.

The early Muslims were also aware of the fact that as upholders of the Last Revelation they were entrusted with world leadership, however, this did not mean that the role of other faith communities was over. They in fact felt obliged to seek the other communities' willing participation and for that matter chart out a common program of action or *kalimatun sawa*, as the Qur'an calls it. However, owing to some political upheavals things started changing in Abbasid Baghdad. With the rise of the *mawalis*, the naturalized Arabs, on the social scenario and the domination of *ahle-kitab* and other groups in administrative services, some Arab tribes felt as if they were gradually

being pushed to the margin. This was the time when many stories were fabricated and floated to weaken the pluralistic social fabric. The fabricated, never-happened incident about Banu Quraiza which tells that the Prophet was so much against the Jews that he personally ordered and witnessed the annihilation of a 600-member strong Jewish tribe surfaced for the first time in this era only. During the same period, we also hear people talking of Omerian stipulations about the People of the Book possibly attributed to Caliph Omer, or some other Omer we are never sure which, later came to characterize our attitude towards other faith communities. Traditions that establish the supremacy of the Quraish tribe and the call for establishing an Arab hegemony can also be better explained against this historical background when Arabism or Arab *Asabiyah* rather than Islam came to dictate Muslim identity. From the universal brotherhood of submitters, we shrunk into Arab-Muslim identity as Islam became the ideology of the new fast emerging Arab Empire. Previously, it was the Muslims who came to serve Islamic mission, but with the establishment of the empire, it was Islam that had to serve the empire. Then, there were the crusaders who were locked in fierce battle with Muslim army for almost two hundred years. This certainly had to affect our perception of the Christian nation. And it did. As a result the entire Islamic discourse changed. The world appeared to us as divided between the abode of Islam and the abode of *kufr*. Travelling through and settling in *kufr*-land was considered abominable. This attitude eventually led to the closing of the Muslim mind. Closed in our own environs we knew very little what changes were taking place in other parts of the world. With the sudden rise of colonial powers when we finally woke up to the new reality, it was already too late.

For a re-start we need to travel back, from cultural Islam to pure Islam. A re-evaluation of the entire corpus of exegetical writings on the various conflicting shapes and forms of Muslim identity is urgently needed. A humble beginning can be made with the following basic premises:

- At the heart of Islamic mission lies the call to create a global society of submitters (*rabbānīn*). As the colour of God is the hallmark of the followers of Mohammad, they are expected to sing the glory of God in unison with the other faith communities. We should not lose sight of the fact that Mohammad is the converging point of the entire prophetic tradition as he came to establish no new Ummah but to revive the Abrahamic religion. The Qur'anic concept of *Ummah Muslimah* is a broader term which encompasses all the prophets of God and their true followers.
- The concept of *al-wala' wa al-bara'* as explained in the Qur'an is essentially to convey that the ideological realm is divided between the submitters and the

rejecters. Nevertheless, this does not mean that submitters are not to be found outside the cultural House of Islam. Unlike other nations, Muslims are no cultural group nor are they supposed to grow in isolation. The Arab culture that unfortunately in the course of their centuries-long journey has transformed the followers of Mohammad, from the *Ummah Muslimah* into the *Ummah Mohammadiyah*, is not to be taken as the integral component of Islam.

- Owing to the influence of exegetic literature the Muslim mind has been confused about some of the seemingly conflicting verses of the Qur'an that determine our attitude towards the People of the Book. Usually our exegetes have employed suitable historical contexts to resolve these contradictions that appeared to them pointing to different directions. I strongly feel that studying a verse in isolation or in a given historical context is a flawed methodology. History, if allowed to supersede the Revelation, can only produce disasters. What is required is to reconsider all such seemingly conflicting verses in the general revelatory atmosphere of the Qur'an. My own study of such verses has made me believe that the followers of Mohammad, by virtue of being the upholders of last revelation, have a clear edge over other faith communities. They have to lead the prophetic struggle till end time. And as this global leadership in itself is a daunting task the policy making has to be well-guarded and at no cost should be allowed to get influenced or diluted by the 'other'. Despite their recognition as faith communities the People of the Book are not to be inducted in the inner circle or be allowed to affect our policy making:

﴿ لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَنَةً وَيُحَذِّرْكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴾ [3:28]

However, this does not mean that we have any grudge against them or consider their faith inferior:

﴿ لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنْهَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴾ [3:113]

Having assigned to world leadership the Qur'an tells us what to expect from the other believing nations, who can be helpful and to what extent:

﴿ لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرِي ذَلِكَ بِأَنْ مِنْهُمْ قَسِيصِينَ وَرُهَبَانًا وَأَنْهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴾ [5:82]

But the Jews too are not to be ignored either:

﴿ وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ أُمَّةٍ يَهُودًا بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ ﴾ [7:159]

Given such clear Qur'anic guidelines there can be little doubt that the remnants of earlier prophetic communities are crucial for us. Based on *kalimatun sawa* we have to forge a working relation with them. The members of the faith communities have to be judged individually and on their own merit; for among them are also people who pay no heed to the divine guidance. Such rowdy elements should not be allowed to determine the direction of our joint struggle:

﴿ وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ ۗ قُلْ إِنْ هَدَىٰ اللَّهُ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ ۗ

وَلَيْنِ اتَّبَعَتْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ ۗ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴾ [2:120]

Be they the remnants of earlier prophetic traditions or the communitarian Muslims of today, what distinguishes them in the eyes of God is their faith (*iman*) and good deeds (*amal saleh*). Nobody is a born *kafir*. Like *iman*, *kufir* is also a worldview that can enslave any individual no matter which nation or culture he or she belongs to. In the Qur'an mention is made of the *kuffar* of *ahle kitab* who were desirous of clear evidence for their journey back to faith. The journey from the realm of faith to the realm of *kufir* and vice versa is basically a change in one's worldview, a paradigm shift. It is a possibility open to every body and at all time. Whenever there would be any serious attempt to reconstitute the society of submitters, its addressee would not only be the Jew, or the Christians or the communitarian Muslims of today, rather, it will be open to submitters of all hues.

When the trumpet will be blown, all those who come forward to sing the glory of God in unison will be accepted as the valid member of the *Ummah Muslimah*. In the past, people who responded to this call and gathered around the Prophet came from divergent believing and non-believing nations. Bilal of Ethiopia, Salman of Persia, Sohaib of Rome, the Muhajiroon of Makkah and the Ansar tribes of Yathrab, all came together to share the new worldview that became the hallmark of their identity; the submission to one Lord God. This intellectual and spiritual revolution had transformed the remote village of Yathrab into al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, the City of Enlightenment. Today too, if the followers of Mohammad can rediscover what once made them Muslim per se, it is very likely that they find themselves, once again, amidst a new Enlightenment.

# Futurizing Islam

*When people will be connected together  
When the female child buried alive will be questioned  
for what crime was she killed  
When the dissemination of written material will know no bounds  
When the Garden will be brought to near  
Shall each soul know what it has put forward*

*(Al-Qur'an 81:7-14)*

While reading these lines of the Qur'an one comes across a postmodern spatial scenario and is immediately reminded of the World Wide Web. Here, the vision of the Day of Judgment suddenly gets mixed with a mundane living, a world where modern life has almost taken over the traditional space. No wonder, the Qur'an, the word of God as it is, enables us to see the past, the present and the future in one single vision like a sudden glimpse of a lightning flash.

The creation of a virtual space away from the real world is no ordinary wonder. A world where millions are actively engaged in deliberations on issues -- almost anything under the sky is a phenomenon rapidly molding even the most conservative amongst us. The cyber world has no official clergy to whom one has to look up for approval nor is it possible here to subdue an alternative opinion with the barrel of a gun. In the cyber world there is no capital city, no focused metropolis, no center and no periphery. It is a truly postmodern scenario where the human mind is free to build his/her own mental picture from the flood of floating thought fragments. In a world thus created ideas are judged on their own merit, without any weight of the pulpit attached to them. Endowed with a profound sense of good and evil, here human mind is equally exposed to Satan and his adversaries. Amidst a plethora of set answers to pet questions dug up from ancient books there are also issues inviting us to think afresh. From superficial propaganda to serious academic debates, the net world has created much of a scenario of *إذ الصحف نشرت* a big bang of ideas.

The stage is set for a free, frank and truly international debate, for the emergence of a pure message of God without any local colour or cultural and geographical moorings. Islam, as it is the message of God to humanity and Mohammad as he is a Warner to all and a blessing for the entire world, where then can such a universal

message and its prophet find a better appreciation than the Cyber world? The traditional Muslim mind is baffled as the new space has pushed the old division of the world as *darul-Islam* or *darul-Kufr* into oblivion. It is not possible any more to live in watertight compartments. Those fond of looking at the world through a cultural glass or identifying the message of God with Arab culture may find uncomfortable the new, culture-free understanding of God's message in the world wide web. Calling Islam a Middle-Eastern religion is a fashion on steep decline and so is the traditional projection of Islam by some of its revered exponents who presents it in an Arab cultural straitjacket.

In some weak moments of Muslim history our intellectuals and ulema believed that the only way to ensure survival of Islam was to preserve the outer manifestations of the traditional mode of living. Ibne Taimiyah's famous treatise *Iqtidha Sirat al-Mustaqeem fi Mukhalefah Ashab al-Jaheem*, a desperate move to arrest our decline, is perhaps the most telling document of a misplaced vision. The Islam that emerges from such treatises is all about a sense of dressing and a penchant for staying away from the 'other': من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم. This fake and unworthy tradition, a mere *asnad jayyid* by Ibne Taimiyah's own admission, has been instrumental in shaping the Muslim mind of the decline period. Identification of Islam with the Arab culture created serious doubts about its universal claim and brought the Islamic *dawah* to a halt in non-Arabian regions. So influential was this single treatise that its echo is found in different places throughout the ages. In India, Ahmed Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah considered it an obligation for the faithful to resist anything non-Arab and take pride in everything Arab. Unfortunately, this exclusive Arab colour of Islam has come to be regarded as so natural that for most of us today it is almost impossible to visualize an authentic Muslim without an Arabian or Eastern dress. For centuries we are told that wearing a non-Arabian dress or even getting a non-Arabian hair-style can make one's faith void. Even learning a foreign language is not spared. Based on their understanding of this fabricated tradition, it became completely *haram* (unlawful) to learn the Persian language. And this unlawfulness, by all implications, should now be extended to English, French, German and other foreign languages. For it was mistakenly believed, as Ibne Taimiyah has it, that the Persian language makes one *munafiq* (hypocrite). Worse still, according to this view, if a Muslim gets settled in a non-Muslim land, on the Day of Judgment he will meet his fate with the *Kuffar*.

This geographical and cultural projection of a universal *deen* not only forced Muslims to limit themselves within the psychological boundaries of their own making, it also created a sense of fear and hatred for the other. As opposed to the message of



the Qur'an calling for a global society based on *tawhid*, the upholders of the *neo-tawhid* were claiming that they alone have patented the worship of one true God. Unmindful of the far-reaching negative implications of this closed mind-set, the *neo-tawhidis* went on preaching: 'it is commonly held belief of *ahl-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* that the Arab race has an edge over the non-Arabs.' Besides betraying the essential Islamic teachings, such highly irresponsible pronouncements paved the way for an Arab versus non-Arab and East versus West clash.

In an ever-shrinking world where the believers have no other option but to ride on the same globe alongside with the non-believers, the *neo-tawhidi* understanding of Islam is put to scrutiny. Sitting in an Internet Café in the Arabian city of Qaseem or Riyadh, the faithful is virtually breathing in the same world with millions totally stranger to him. What otherwise might be considered abhorring, in a private chat room the believer and the non-believer, the male and the female get mixed. A dialogue, fraught with all kinds of danger though, becomes unavoidable.

The *neo-tawhidis* alone are not to be blamed for this closed mind-set. There are the Indians, the Chinese, the Jews and the Americans all up to claim a sole right on the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For quite sometime they have been conditioned to think in purely nationalistic, nay, rather jingoistic terms. For many among them the vital question is for whom is the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In a situation where the buzzword is domination over the 'other' it is no surprise if a group of Muslims too sincerely feels that after the dismantlement of the 'evil empire' the only hurdle in establishing their hegemony is the 'evil Americans' whose fall they must engineer. While this attitude otherwise appears to be a natural corollary of what goes on in the real world, nonetheless, it belittles our hope in the future. If religiously inspired Muslims, who still have some vague sense of being given the responsibility of leading history till the end time, envision the future of our globe in terms of domination, where would one look for a refuge? Islam has come to liberate people from all kinds of domination and if Muslims end up in replacing others' domination by their own, it will defeat the very purpose of their existence.

It is high time to visualize a future world in which no one single group is let free to dominate the center-stage but all are united as one single family in the worship of one God. For such a broad, all embracing vision of Islam to move forward effectively Muslims must come out of their traditional mind-set. Unless we realize that we too, like our ancestors, have been endowed with heads on our shoulders and that the sole function of our head is not just to place a cap or a tarbush on it, we cannot put aside the intellectual garbage that we have so willingly accumulated in the course of our

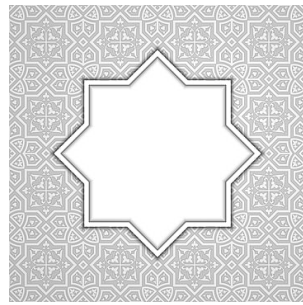
centuries long intellectual journey. For a people so fond of using epithets like 'Islamic Art', 'Islamic Philosophy', 'Islamic Architecture' etc. it would be a great challenge to concede that we as Ummah Muslimah were not entrusted to create, what we did, the grandeur of Abbasid Baghdad, or the splendor of Moorish Spain. It needs no less than a paradigm shift to realize that the architectural wonder of the Taj and other marvels of Mughal India that sometimes remind us of our 'glorious' past, were in fact a digression from our original prophetic plan.

The traditional mind that considers 'Islam as history' equally valid as 'Islam as Revelation' and insists that the latter must be understood in conformity with the former, has posed a great challenge to our return to pure Islam. It has created serious confusion in young minds about the nature and function of Islam itself. For example, in the West, revival of Arab or eastern culture has acquired religious sanctity. National liberation struggles in different parts of the world fought by Muslims are looked as Jihad activity, a religious obligation. True, Muslims as a nation are the worst victims today of the Bush-Blair tyranny. And it is also true that a nation being continuously inflicted with fresh wounds has the right to fight back, to resist the way it can. But a prophetic vision and concern for all demands from us that we, as upholders of the last Revelation, must look beyond mere self-rescue operations. No doubt, it is we who were dehumanized in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Gharib prison and burnt alive in the streets of Gujarat. It is our blood spilling on a daily basis in Palestine and other places. Yet we should not forget in our most nerve shaking moments that we cannot inflict on others what they did to us. God forbid! We cannot indulge in dehumanization of fellow humans or take innocent lives. And this *is* the source of our strength.

In a world where the religious leaders have long established the norm of looking at each single issue from a communitarian angle, securing the interest of their community more than the truth, calling on Muslim ulema alone to look beyond mere Muslim interest will raise many eyebrows. But if we are sensitive to the plight of Man and aware of our religious responsibilities towards humanity at large we cannot let each day pass sitting idly in our fortress of *Muslimness* hoping that one day everything will be fine.

SECTION II

# The Problem



# What Really Went Wrong?

﴿اللهم أرني الأشياء كما هي﴾

In the rise and fall of communities, *kalimah* or vision plays an important role. In their transformation from the chosen to the disgraced community, what traumas the Israelites had undergone, what painful sufferings they had to bear have been recounted in considerable detail in the initial chapters of the Qur'an. History at its highest level and in all its complex dimensions has been manifested to us with reference to the Jews and the Christians, so that we who are the last chosen people of Allah take lessons from it and gain insight for our own journey through history. One reason for the frequency with which the Qur'an refers to the earlier communities, especially the Jewish community, is that its status was that of the chosen community before Islam. Secondly, the Israelites were preferred to all other communities and enjoyed precedence because of their ancient lineage. But they were visited upon by drastic consequences for not acting in a way befitting their status and for not being respectful to the enormous blessings with which Allah had endowed them. This contains a lesson for us and that is – even the most preferred community could change itself to the most cursed community, depending on the actions of its members. To Allah, the measure of preferment is good action and not racial pride or lineage. When Abraham had mentioned his lineage to Allah, it was clarified beyond doubt that Allah's mercy and preference would stay with the community that would remain on the true path. Disobedient people, even if they belong to the lineage of Abraham, will be the object of Allah's wrath. The decay and decline of the Israelites mirror the decline of Muslims and it will not be difficult for the Muslims to search for the reasons for their fall in the story of the fall of the Israelites. What is needed is that rather than taking the Qur'an as a book of historical facts and ancient relics, we should look at it as the Book of Guidance and insight. And we have to keep our heart and mind open to understand the moral of those stories.

We should acknowledge the fact that like the Israelites, the Muslim community has also been deprived of its sovereign position for a long period. We are not certainly among those communities today who are in a position of the moral arbiter, to decide

what is right and what is wrong. Decline has come to us in slow, silent steps. As we have got accustomed to measure our rise and fall in terms of political conquests and defeats, we could not even have an awareness of this decline before the debacle of Baghdad. Even after the debacle of Baghdad, the cultural centers that were established in the Islamic world and the military victories that came our way kept us under the delusion that we were still holding the position of the chosen community, and that the future of humanity still depended on us. Actually, the way the concept of the faith of Muhammad was slowly converted into a faith in political rule, and the way political domination and the domination of the leaders tightened its grip on the Muslim society left one with the clear impression that a new kind of Judaism had made its place within Islam. The Word, or the Revelation that illuminated the environment and that radiated from people's eyes and hearts had fallen a victim to the whims and fancies of leaders and the faith became stagnant, a mere bundle of dead rituals. The Book was protected all right, but it had to face the combined assault of history, oral traditions and human commentary and interpretations, so that even the common people thought it safe to surmise that the earlier generations had already derived the advantages that were to be derived from the Revelations. There was no issue left under the sun that required further reflection. It was understood that firstly there was no need to access the Revelations directly. If anyone wanted to seek guidance from this book of mere recitation (as it has been reduced to), it was essential that he should study it with the eyes of the predecessors and think with their minds. Even the slightest deviation from the understanding of the predecessors was considered blasphemy. As the centuries advanced, the grip of the predecessors on the Revelation tightened. Unnecessary debates in sciences and arts and speculations in Islamic jurisprudence made it impossible for everyone – whether a learned person or a commoner – to cross over this fence of Para-textual materials thickly woven around the Revelations.

In one tradition it has been predicted about the Muslim community that its evolution would follow a similar graph as that of the Israelites. It would resemble the other as much as two pieces of a pair of shoes resemble each other. Quite aside from the question of the authenticity of this tradition, at least this much is clear from the above statement that the period in which this tradition came to the fore, the thinking people had begun to realize that the followers of Islam had started following the path already trodden by the Israelites. But we who are accustomed to interpreting the phrase *maghdhoob alaihim* to mean the Israelites have ignored the simple truth that Allah's wrath is visited upon all the communities that have left the path of righteousness.

The cause of our decline is due to no other reason except for the fact that despite the salutary and instructive account of the Israelites in the Qur'an we, regrettably, have been following the same path. And as Allah's laws are immutable (وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا), we too have been dismissed from the seat of leadership. The only difference between the Israelites and us is that in their case the Revelations, human commentaries and interpretations, and accretions and distortions in jurisprudence had become so mixed up that it had become difficult to disentangle one from another. On the contrary, the Revelations are still intact with us in their original form. Though it is not easy to penetrate the barrier put up by human commentaries and interpretations, there are clues given in the protected Book itself that will help people to pull down this barrier. This is the fundamental difference that keeps intact the status of the Muslim community, despite its fallen state, as the inheritor of the Revelations. And certainly, this is an honor bestowed on no other community in the world of today.

There is no doubt that the history of the Israelites contains much for us. Sometimes it seems that in recounting their stories, we are running through our own story of decline. It is only natural to feel so. It is surprising that in the cases of both the communities, the ideological deviation from their appointed path has been on similar lines. Just as the Israelites had built a barrier of human fancies around the Word, Muslims too, regrettably, got into the same act. One reason for this could be that right from the beginning, the Jewish scholars had been embracing Islam. Whatever the motivations behind their acceptance of Islam, it cannot be denied that when people come into the fold of a new religion, they also bring their cultural inheritance with them. Particularly, into a religion that presents itself as the completion of earlier faiths, i.e., Judaism and Christianity. For the adherents of such religions it will be only a natural tendency to utilize Judaic and Christian sources. That is why in the evolution of Islamic thought, the borrowings from the scholarly traditions of these former religions cannot be ignored.

The Jewish influence crept into the Islamic thought at three levels. Firstly, one group of Jewish scholars consisted of the early Jewish converts to Islam like one of the esteemed companions of the Prophet, Abdullah bin Salam. Another prominent Muslim of this category included a wife of the Prophet, Safia who came from a Jewish stock and was the daughter of a prominent Jewish scholar. The scholarship of this group of men of letters was absolutely positive in the sense that they had confirmed the apostleship of Muhammad in the light of the earlier heavenly scrolls. A second group of Jewish scholars consisted of those among whom Ka'ab al-Ahbar (d.652 CE) and Wahb bin Munbbah (d.728 CE) were prominent. They had also become the men of

faith and their contribution to the Muslim society was substantial. But their earlier knowledge always interfered with their understanding of the new Revelations. Ka'ab al-Ahbar was a Jew from Yemen who had embraced Islam during the Caliphate of Omer. It is said that he had guided Omer in his journey to Jerusalem. Despite this august status enjoyed by him, his stance in matters of the analysis and interpretation of Islamic thought is regarded as controversial. Even during the period of the Prophet's Companions, people had raised objections about his understanding of the Islamic views in the light of the Judaic sources. It is said that Abuzar had got him whipped to serve him warning in some matters. But in Muslim history and in the books of traditions, Ka'ab has been known as a reliable transmitter. Similarly, Wahb bin Munbbah was a neo-Muslim Jew from Yemen. In his time, he was regarded as one of the most reputed scholars of the Judaic and the Christian sources. *Kitab Al-Israiliat*, which is regarded as a seminal text relating to the sciences of the People of the Book, is attributed to him. This book and its author had played a significant role in spreading *Israiliat*, the mythical worldview of the Jews, and getting it approved as a supporting literature for the understanding of Islam. It is said that he was also whipped by the instruction of the Governor of Yemen. The third generation of Jewish scholars consisted of those who had accepted Islam because without it they could not have acquired high positions in the administration. In the Abbasid period, when it became possible for the new converts to hold important positions in the administration, there were many among them who used their entry into the new religion as a kind of passport to new social and political opportunities. Socially and educationally, the Israelites were in such a position that they could take advantage of the political changes. The most prominent name in this regard is that of Yaqub bin Kaleeth Al-Baghdadi (930-991 CE) who held a key position of policy making in the Egypt ruled by the Fatimides. It is said that he played a key role in delineating the contours of the Ismaili school. In his time he had the status of an authority on the school of Ismaili jurisprudence.

It should also be kept in mind that in the initial years, the attitude of Muslim scholars towards *Israiliat* was positive. Accounts of prophets, the history of the universe, creation of Adam, description of angels and similar other subjects about which detailed descriptions were not available in the Qur'an would be easily available in their heavenly scrolls and their interpretations. In the beginning, the Muslim scholars displayed extreme generosity regarding these sources. In consequence, many details from the Judaic and Christian sources gradually crept into our books of commentaries and interpretations. Especially, this had a profound impact on the



explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an. Later, a critical attitude developed regarding this body of knowledge, but the interpretation of the Qur'an and the process of deducing instructions from it that had got institutionalized in the initial centuries, could not be redressed. The result was – just as the Jews had put up the barrier of Talmud around the Revelation, almost similarly we Muslims had also made the Divine Word a prisoner of history and Jurisprudence.

If the *Torah*, the fundamental book of the Jews about which the Qur'an confirms the fact that it is from Allah, had remained intact with all its glory, the sovereign power of the Jews would have remained protected. But this blessing of Allah was considered so harsh by the Jews that not to speak of making it the book of guidance, they began to express doubts about how to make it the book of practical action. The divine commandments in *Torah Shebikhtab* seemed so stringent and inflexible to the Jews that they created *Torah Shebalpeh* to bring some flexibility in it. Two *Torahs* were created from one. One was the Book of guidance revealed by Allah and other was the product of the stupid wish fulfillments of the Israelites. It was declared that Moses received written instructions in the form of *Torah*; in addition to it, he also received verbal instructions from God continuously for forty days that had reached us through later prophets, scholars and religious seers. One version compliments the other. That is why the written Torah cannot be understood without the oral Torah. At times, the *Torah Shebalpeh* was called God's special blessings because of which it became possible to incorporate certain flexibility in the written Torah. Actually the *Torah* that was given to Moses in the written form of tablets which, after the destruction of the temple, the writers of Pentateuch had tried to protect, was another written document, whereas the *Torah Shebalpeh* consisted of the sayings and the hearsay recounted and reported by the elderly people and leaders, that incorporated the sayings and thoughts of common rabbis as well. Despite this historical truth both the written and the oral *Torahs* were accepted as two sources for the interpretation of the Revelations. Pentateuch was accepted as the sacred Torah and *Mishnah* and *Gemarah* were given the status of written documents for the oral Torah.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, Pentateuch became subservient to human understanding and historical accounts. The number of the written tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai was limited, but the respectability accorded to the oral Torah for its understanding encompassed the heritage of human wisdom of the past centuries. Nowadays, in the Jewish scheme of thought, there is no concept of understanding Pentateuch without Talmud. The barrier of Talmud around Pentateuch is so strong that the written Torah has become subservient to the oral Torah.

Now, look at the community of Muslims. The final Revelation is still intact with them in all its pristine glory. But here also, one can find the barrier of secondary knowledge around it. The shape that the Muslim thought has acquired over the centuries is considered to represent the authenticated thoughts of the ancient Muslim scholars. Any new perspective is not considered reliable.<sup>2</sup> We, too, have come to believe in two kinds of Revelations: one is known as *wahi matlu* (Revelation that is recited by Muslims) and the other as *wahi ghair-matlu* (Revelation that is not recited). It is said that *wahi matlu* has remained intact in the form of the Qur'an, and *wahi ghair-matlu* consists of those orders and instructions that Allah had given the Prophet, over and above the verses in the Qur'an; that the authentic compilations of these have been edited by scholars of traditions in the third century hijra, and that they are commonly known as *Sehah Sitta* or *Kutub Tis'a*. This belief has taken roots among the vast majority of Muslims that the Qur'an alone is not the perfect manifestation of the Revelation, but also there are many things outside it. Mystics gave a further spin to this view when they began to narrate traditions directly from the Prophet.<sup>3</sup> It is another matter that these traditions could not gain the status of authentic traditions among Muslims. However, about the compilations of traditions by human beings this belief gained ground that some of these compilations are only next to Allah's Book in matters of authenticity, and in them *wahi ghair-matlu* has been preserved without which a proper understanding of the Qur'an is not possible. In sum, here also, the concept of the written and the oral *Torah* left its impact and, in practice, it so happened that the written Revelations became subservient to the oral ones. Detailed discussions on this issue will occur in the chapter devoted to traditions.

The Judaic scholars had created another barrier around Revelations in the name of 'the Science of the Hidden' (*batiniyat*). Under the impact of mysticism, a debate started raging about the real and hidden meanings of Revelations. The Judaic mystics reached the conclusion that the soul of the Torah lay in its hidden meanings. Human beings can reach the goal of truth by themselves provided they develop an awareness of those hidden meanings. The Torah that was revealed as a book of guidance to all the Israelites was reduced to a preserve of the chosen few. It was clarified in no uncertain terms in *Mishnah* that the knowledge about the hidden meanings of *Genesis* should not be given to more than one person at one time. This was strictly forbidden. It was also said that the knowledge of the first chapter of the 'Book of Ezekiel' should not be imparted to any person if he has not already attained the status of sainthood (*wilayat*).<sup>4</sup> *Zohar*, regarded as the most famous book of the Judaic mysticism, is known for taking the help of personal revelations in the explanation and interpretation of the Torah.

We cannot say this with certainty that the concept of the hidden meaning of the Qur'an has such strong roots among Muslims, as it had among the Jews. However, it can be said with certainty that the concept of the hidden meanings in the Qur'an is not an entirely alien thought in our scholarly tradition. The greatest seer of mysticism, Ibn Arabi, despite all his deviations and misguidance, is still regarded as a milestone in our scholarly and cultural heritage. His *Fusoos Al-Hikam* and *Futoohat-e-Makkiah* are considered foundational books of Islamic spirituality. The same Ibn Arabi says that there are hidden meanings in the alphabets and numbers in the Qur'an, and only those with the requisite knowledge can uncover those hidden meanings. He also believes that these people derive their knowledge about the faith from Allah and his Prophet directly. According to him, 'the Perfect Man' (*al-insan al-kamil*), seers and mystics draw from the same source as the Prophet'.<sup>5</sup> As Muslims have accepted this belief in principle that the Prophet, apart from receiving *wahi*, also received *wahi khafi* or *ilham*, and the mystics can also receive *ilham*, this (*ilham*) became accepted as a mode of understanding the hidden meanings of the Qur'an. This gave birth to the concepts of *shariat* and *tariqat*. Traditions of the following kind were brought to the fore: according to Abu Hurairah, 'the Prophet gave me two containers. One I have uncovered and made public. If I open the other, then I am afraid, my jugular vein may be slit.'<sup>6</sup> The knowledge that Abu Hurairah did not make public is the *tariqat*, i.e., the hidden knowledge, to which anyone and everyone cannot have access.

Whether it is the Qur'an or the Torah, the search for hidden meanings is, in fact, a process of distortion of and deviation from the text. It is tantamount to imposing one's own longings on Allah's Will. We think that this kind of mystic interpretation of the Qur'an owes its origin, largely, to the Judaic mysticism. This kind of interpretation bears the clear imprint of 'Zohari mysticism'. In the search of such hidden meanings our scholars also, like the Jews, were drawn to the knowledge of alphabets and numbers. As among the Jews, this concept gained ground among us also that the real meaning and the secrets of the Revelation lay in the organization of words in a certain scheme and determining their numbers. The idea that determining the numbers can be an aid to understanding the meaning of the Qur'an has been borrowed from the Judaic sources.<sup>7</sup> However limited the success of the advocates of hidden meaning in the Qur'an may have been among Muslims, it cannot be denied that they are generally regarded as men of vision and austerity and cannot be totally dismissed from Muslim thought.

The use of Judaic sources in the understanding of the Qur'an and the interference of the Judaic ways of understanding has given rise to further complexity. Muslims also

began to display a kind of attitude towards the Divine Book as could be found in the Judaic tradition. For instance, as among the Jews, this belief took roots among Muslims that like the Torah, the real version of the Qur'an was protected in the heavens. From the description in surah *Buruj* that the Qur'an is preserved in the *laohe mahfooz* it was deduced that the *laohe mahfooz* is somewhere in the heavens, even though there is no scope for such a conjecture in the verse nor the Prophet had said anything to this effect. *Lohe mahfooz* actually means between the covers. This is precisely to say that Qur'an was a definite text preserved in book form. Our exegetes were influenced by the Jewish stories in which Torah is said to be preserved in heaven though its original was lost during the second destruction of the Temple. Contrary to the days of Torah, Qur'an was revealed in an age when scribes were easily available and the prophet took all possible measures to preserve the text in the most accurate form. The Companions were being told that the act of reading the Qur'an by sight and to conduct its teaching and study through written documents are better than recitation from memory. Copies of Revelations in the written form were circulating among people. Besides this, the Prophet took such precaution that besides committing the verses to memory himself and having had the Companions commit them to memory, he made special arrangement for their written recording and the diacritical marks that should be used. This is a historically verified fact that before the Prophet departed from the world the Qur'an had already been compiled in the volume form. This was the first occasion in human history when such a comprehensive and elaborate process encompassing teaching and learning, committing to memory, recitation, writing, determining the diacritical marks etc., was undertaken for the protection and preservation of the Revelation. This is because of the definitive text of the Qur'an preserved between the covers – *laohe mahfooz* – that saved the Qur'an, as promised by Allah, from any interference of the Devil and any kind of human distortions and accretions. The human history of the past fourteen centuries is witness to this fact. This simple fact has been turned into a riddle because of the interference of Judaic scholarship. If someone declared that *laohe mahfooz* was to employ 'Protected Tablet' which was in the heavens and which was inaccessible to the devil, someone else found it etched on the forehead of angel Israfil. Some said that it stood for 'the Mother of all books' where the Qur'an and other heavenly scrolls are preserved. By according respectability to some weak traditions as genuine Hadiths, some tried to convince the people that Protected Tablet is a treasure of knowledge that contains information about the future. Allah Almighty Himself looks at it 360 times a day. It is written there as to who would rise or fall on a particular day, which beggar would become a millionaire and which

millionaire would turn into a beggar, who would die and who would live. Some asserted that the first thing that is written by Allah in the Protected Tablet is -- 'I am God, there is no other God except me, Muhammad is my Prophet. He who bowed his head to my judgment and resigned to the sufferings sent from me, and he who was grateful for my blessings, I wrote his name among the faithful, and he who was not so is like the one who has accepted someone else but me as God.' Some said that the length of the Protected Tablet is equal to the distance from earth to sky and its breadth encompasses the entire world from the east to the west. Someone reported that Protected Tablet is made of white pearls, its pages are made of red pearls and only heavenly light has been used in its writing and copying. In sum, there are as many versions as there are people. All these traditions are weak and the inventions of human imagination. The authors of *Jalalain* say that all these debates have no validity, but it is also a fact that there is a surfeit of such interpretations in such reliable and trustworthy books of commentaries as *Tabari*, *Qurtabi* and *Ibn Kathir*. You had an occasion to see how the discussion about the book within covers, which has the status of a Mission Statement for the Muslim Community, has been lifted from earth and placed into the heavens in safe custody, and how Muslims, like the Jews, became victims of the same superstition in believing that whatever we have is just a reflection of the real Qur'an whose original copy is there in the Protected Tablet, on the right side of Allah's throne (*arsh*).<sup>8</sup>

This account of the Protected Tablet has been presented here just as an illustration. As a matter of fact, what we want to underline is that under the impact of the Judaic sources of scholarship an attitude developed amongst us whereby even those acts that we were supposed to undertake in this world, the works that had been enjoined upon us as our religious obligation, have been earmarked by us to be done in the next world. Or, we pinned all our hopes on the emergence of someone from the world of Unseen who would solve all our problems. As regards the emergence of the Messiah, under the impact of Judaic and Christian thought, the belief about *mahdi* of the last epoch, the promised messiah and *mujaddid* has taken roots among Muslims. For a Prophet's followers who believed in the finality of Prophethood this belief is quite fatal. But we who are the victims of our own misdeeds are waiting for the Man of the Unseen and want to see the last Prophet ensconced in his most praised status (*muqaam-e mahmood*) merely on the strength of our longings and prayers. For the sake of our convenience, we have shifted this position to the Hereafter when this special status is related to forgiveness, although there is no other objective of the prayer for *muqaam-e mahmood* except the wish that the mission of Prophet Muhammad be

completed, the faith gain prominence and the flag of the just dispensation of Muhammad flutter in the whole world. On the contrary, if one thinks that this is a position that the last Prophet would be invested with on the Day of Judgment, something that Allah has promised, then there is no reason to doubt that Allah would not fulfill His promise. There is no reason to worry about that. We can have any possible role in this prayer only when the mission is to be accomplished in this world through our own efforts.

As the last chosen community, the Qur'anic revelations constitute a much-valued treasure for us. But it is regrettable that our transgressions have drawn such a veil between Revelations and us, which has transformed this Book of guidance into a Book of wish fulfillments. It is said that every word in the Qur'an is a blessed entity; to read it, hear it and see it, whether one knows its meanings and implications or not, is a blessed act in itself. Some verses and chapters are said to have specific merits; reading them repeatedly has the virtue of driving away misfortunes in this world, and success in the Hereafter. By and large, these are the actions that the Jews had already accomplished with regard to their holy book. Their rabbis had told them that the person who had once heard even a word of the Torah with his ears would not go to hell, so much so that if a Jew had even as much as taken the names of the rabbis and his ancestors with respect, this was enough to take him to paradise. Then this belief was invented that the mediation of Abraham on the Day of Judgment will save all circumcised Israelites from the fire of hell.<sup>9</sup> This kind of statement limited the merits of Revelations to only deriving some blessings. People only concentrated on the external form of the Revelation, its reading and script. As among the Jews, the Muslims also began to copy the Qur'an in beautiful calligraphy on ornate pages. On the one hand, by limiting the merit of the Revelation only to the derivation of blessings, they alienated themselves from its real meanings; on the other, it was sought to be impressed upon the people that anyone and everyone was not equipped to derive benefits from Revelations. The Jews had made the Torah subservient to the Talmudic scholarship. They had taken it for granted that no understanding of the Torah could be reliable if it was not in line with the thoughts of the Jewish scholars and commentators, nor was it possible for anyone to gain direct access to the merits of the Torah by acquiring Talmudic scholarship through individual efforts. A similar kind of trend also began to be seen among the Muslims regarding the Qur'anic revelations. Following the four imams became an article of faith with them. As to the question of deriving direct access to the merits of the Qur'an, this opinion became widespread among the people that only a *mujtahid* could do that. A *mujtahid*, according to Allama Baghwi, was one

'who embodies five kinds of knowledge: knowledge of Allah's Book, knowledge of the Prophet's traditions, sayings of the ancient scholars, knowledge of lexicography and inferences. Besides these, he should have the full knowledge of the abrogator (*nasikh*) and what is abrogated (*mansukh*), the essence and the details, the exclusive and the common, the confirmed and the suspect, the forbidden and the unwelcome permissible, the obligatory and the desirable. As for the traditions, he should be aware about which one of them are weak, which ones authentic, and which ones do not have an unbroken chain of transmitters. In case of apparent contradiction between the Qur'an and the Hadith, he should know the art of synthesis through juxtaposition (*tatbeeq*). As for the laws, he should be aware of the sayings of the Prophet's Companions and their successors (*tabe'in*), and know most of the edicts given by the jurists. If anyone comes to possess a minimum of these qualities, only then can he enjoy the right to make attempts for direct access to the Revelation.' It is apparent that to find so many merits and the knowledge of so many sciences in one person is such a difficult condition that it would disqualify most of the commonly educated Muslims from gaining direct access to the Book of Guidance<sup>10</sup>. For such people, there remains no other option except this: instead of making the Book of Guidance the center point of their reflection and thought they agree to treat it just as a book of benediction or wish fulfillments.

Among the Israelites, it is an established fact that interpretations and details of the faith are contained in the Talmudic literature. They extended the meaning of Torah to incorporate explanatory, interpretive and juristic literatures in the Oral Torah. The status of Pentateuch has been reduced to that of a holy relic; for all practical purposes, the Talmud serves as the real book of guidance. Among us too, unfortunately, instead of serving as the Book of Guidance, the Qur'an is relegated to the status of a book of wish fulfillments. Among Muslims, such compilations of the Qur'anic surahs are immensely popular, where it is claimed that if one recites them under certain circumstances one earns a vast amount of merit (*ajr*). These compilations also reproduce large numbers of such traditions that claim that even a small merit may be rewarded with thousands of mansions in the Hereafter. Scholars of traditions seem to have been too lax in their acceptance of traditions that talked of the efficacy of the Qur'anic verses in terms of exaggerated rewards. As a consequence, it has become easier to find one's way to paradise through self-devised readings and intoned recitations of specific parts of the Qur'an. Some traditions have transformed the Qur'an from the Book of Guidance to a security manual. There is a tradition narrated by Bukhari that if a person who reads *ayatul kursi* before going to sleep, Allah appoints

a protector for him, and thus his property remains safe from thieves.<sup>11</sup> It goes to the extent that according to some fabricated traditions, من ولد له مولود فسماه مجدا كان هو والوالد في الجنة. Someone said, من قال لا اله الا الله أعطى في الجنة سبعين ألف مدينة، في كل مدينة سبعون الف قصر، في الجنة. Someone said, كل قصر سبعون ألف حورا. Someone said if anybody reads surah Kahaf on Friday, he will remain safe from the machinations of Dajjal.<sup>12</sup> Traditions of this kind have drawn a barrier around the Revelation, which has become difficult to cross for the common man. Some others investigated into the special potentialities of the specific surahs and on that basis brought into currency a whole science of esoteric symbols in the Qur'an, consisting of numbers and alphabets. It was asserted that if someone put up the chart of surah Maryam in his garden, it would come into bloom.<sup>13</sup> Such non-Islamic, rather infidel, ways and esoteric practices reduced the Qur'anic revelations to the level of reprehensible actions. And thus, slowly the Book of Guidance, of the Protected Tablet fame, went out of the hands of the chosen community. The Book is still there with them, bound within its two covers, but its use has been limited to seeking benedictions and sanction for some questionable practices, not as a Book of Guidance. This is because those who were supposed to have been the custodians of the Book of Guidance, and had absolute right over its interpretation and analysis are no longer there. It is taken for granted that the earlier scholars have completed the job of the Qur'anic understanding through their interpretation and analysis – ان الأوائل لم يتركوا للأواخر شيئا. The majority of Muslims follow the four imams with total conformity (*taqlid*); the non-conformists (*ghair muqallid*) have total confidence in the authors of the 'six authentic books'. This is the religious treasure that we have derived from our predecessors. Any direct access to the Revelation has been made impossible by this system of education.<sup>14</sup>

Like the Talmudic laws of the Israelites that should be called *Halacha* in brief, we also have this common assumption prevalent among us that the *mujtahid* has drawn all the necessary inferences on all possible and potential issues from the Qur'an. For the common man, the compilations of literature on Islamic Jurisprudence contain enough material for his guidance. This attitude has resulted in making the people indifferent to the Book, if not rejecting it altogether. The tough conditions for being a *mujtahid*, and the comprehensive knowledge that was demanded for direct access to the Qur'an, led to a situation similar to the one that had earlier been put in place by the Judaic scholars regarding the revelations on Moses. They had asserted, 'We cannot understand some excerpts from the Jewish Bible without Talmud.' They manufactured the belief that 'the right to interpreting Torah has been given by God to the ancients or the elders, and those traditions have as much importance as the text of the



revelation'.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, the Elders also formed this principle on their own that those who avoided studying Talmud could not arrive at a proper understanding of the revealed text. A clear instruction to this effect is available in *Pirke Avot* that was incorporated into *Mishnah* around 250 CE, to the effect that a barrier must be built around the Torah for its protection. The Chapter of the Father begins thus: 'Moses received Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue. These said three things; be deliberate in judging, and raise up many disciples, and make a hedge around the Torah.'<sup>16</sup>

The Talmudic literature is, in fact, this strong hedge or barrier, without which no understanding of Torah is considered reliable today. If we look at it closely, we will find that with regard to Islam the same process has been parroted by our Great Jurists and *mujtahids*. Just as no understanding of Torah is regarded as genuine without Talmudic literature, similarly no process of understanding of the Qur'an, in isolation from the method of interpretation adopted by the Predecessors and Elders, is regarded as reliable.

In the foregoing discussion we have seen how the Elders had laid down extremely stringent conditions for direct access to Revelation, and how they thought that it was only the *mujtahid* who was qualified to do so. The qualification included, apart from the knowledge of the Book and the sunnah, the knowledge of the abrogator and the abrogated, and awareness of the past scholars. As to the question as to how one could gain knowledge about the abrogated verses, Ghazali has referred to the old books where detailed discussions are available on this issue. About the *mujtahid*, this was also considered obligatory that before he undertook *ijtihad* (creative interpretation) he should see to it that it did not run counter to the views of earlier scholars, and whether his views have any sanction from either of the four imams.<sup>17</sup> Thus it can be said that the freedom given to the *mujtahid* in one hand has been snatched away by the other by laying down the condition that his views would have no acceptability if they went against the views of the past scholars. Similarly, by making the books of the earlier *mujtahids* as sources and even decisive for the debate regarding the abrogator and the abrogated, every reading and interpretation of the Qur'anic revelations, in fact, has been made subservient to the views of the pious Elders. In sum, whatever space, if any, was left after the endeavors to make the Qur'anic revelation a prisoner of history and traditions, has been filled in by Jurisprudence.

Torah, which literally means laws or commandments, has the status of the book of law for the Israelites. To circumvent the clear and unambiguous laws of the Torah, the

Judaic scholars gave currency to the belief that the oral Torah enjoys equal importance (vis-à-vis the written Torah) as it has been preserved through memorizing by the Elders from generation to generation. Secondly, a whole system of legal interpretation and analysis emanated from this book of commandments, where the interpretations of Judaic scholars play a greater role than the Revelations themselves. To invest this rabbinic literature with a halo of sacredness it was asserted that it contained a deeper understanding of the revelation, and to bring it on par with the written Torah, it was declared that the sources of all the wisdom and interpretation of the Judaic faith were, in fact, contained in the 'Lightning' and the 'Voice' revealed on Mount Sinai,<sup>18</sup> and that there would be no such question in future about which Moses had not been told on the Sinai. As it is, there was enough scope for interpretation of the Revelation that was communicated through lightning and voice. On top of it, there was the tradition of oral mysticism that made it possible to come up with as many as seventy interpretations of the same piece of revelation.<sup>19</sup> The barrier around Torah created by the rabbinic method of understanding has left the common man with just one option: to agree with the Talmudic interpretation of the revelation, and that's the end of the matter. Moreover, as a significant part of these interpretations pertains to commandments and issues related to faith, for all practical purposes, the Israelites became indifferent to the Torah down the ages. Talmud became the center and the rallying point of their life. Even today, on specific religious occasions, or in the synagogues, the role of the Pentateuch has been limited to a book of intoned recitation. It is read merely for benediction; as for guidance, the comprehensive juristic literature of Talmud is considered enough.

We Muslims do not consider ourselves indifferent, at least in principle, to the Qur'anic revelation. For the majority of Muslims, the Qur'an is still considered to be the Book of Guidance. However, in practice, the literature of Islamic Jurisprudence emanating from the four imams has closed the door of direct access. This state of affairs among us is indicated by the oft-heard dictum, 'the doors to *ijtihad* (fresh interpretation) have been closed.' Although there was a significant section among the Islamic scholars who was in favor of *ijtihad* from the very beginning, in practice, even this section considered *ijtihad* permissible in case of secondary or tertiary issues, and not in the case of the core issues or the fundamentals. The thought that anyone can go beyond the methods and processes of the four imams, and can show us the right path out of the maze, in the light of the revelation, has no place, at least in the conventional Muslim thought. If the understanding of the revelation and its expression found among the four imams is taken to be the ultimate perfection in terms of human

penetration of the Revelation, and if there is no way open to further penetration, then it might as well be said that the literature on Islamic Jurisprudence had made the community indifferent to the Qur'anic revelations. Emotionally, it might not be possible to accept this fact, but the repertoire of literature on Islamic Jurisprudence accumulated over centuries can be adduced as evidence to this.

One wonders why there are such striking similarities between the Israelites and the Muslims in the realms of the evolution of Jurisprudence and in creating a barrier around Revelations. One possible reason could be the cultural impact of one community over the other. The second, and the more important reason, however, is that human intellect, despite its immense potentialities, wants to see the eternal revelation in a codified and accessible form so that it becomes amenable to one's intellectual level. Fundamentally, Revelation is such a light that not only illuminates our path, but also our heart and vision as well. For a man of faith with such a heart to understand the import of revelation and chart his own way in its light is a natural and rather straightforward act. However, if the Revelations are given the form of a book of commandments, then human intellect gradually converts them into a long inventory of do's and don'ts. During the Prophet's time, people were concerned about the import of revelations and not on their form. Osama bin Shareek who was with the Prophet during Haj narrated that 'People would come to him in great numbers. Some would say – I have performed the *saei* before circumambulation; some would say – I have done this before this or this after this. The Prophet would reply – that does not matter. What matters, and what is regrettable, is when someone attacks the honor of his Muslim brother.<sup>20</sup> But when it became fashionable to convert Revelations into a book of commandments, and people started to trace out verses from which commands would emanate, and when books began to be compiled on the Qur'anic commandments, then the Revelation was reduced to the status of 'Thou shalt not do.' The jurists got busy in formulating and codifying them. In the Qur'an the Israelites were hauled up for their tendency to introduce unnecessary issues that led them away from the central point and allowed them to create problems for themselves. Ideally, the scholars of the day should have tried to find answers to the problems of the day through their own study of the Revelations. On the contrary, they got involved with all kinds of hypothetical questions and considered it their duty to find solutions to strange and imaginary problems. In their assemblies, the jurists endeavored to find answers to every imaginary and real problem that might crop up under the sun at any moment. Once the Revelations were brought down to the level of commandments and culture studies, it led to many complexities. Serious disagreements cropped up among the jurists on

many issues, for which the community had to pay a heavy price. It will continue to pay this price till a critical attitude develops in the community in regard to the codified jurisprudence, and it becomes possible for it to have direct access to the Qur'anic revelations.

I was trying to point out the striking similarities between the Israelites and us in matters relating to the Revelations. This should also be kept in mind that in strict religious terms, the position of both the rabbis and the Muslim scholars is quite indeterminate. Contrary to the priesthood among Christians, Judaism and Islam have no formal institution of religious scholars. In spite of this, it is an established fact that in both the faiths, the scholars have been able to carve out significant roles for themselves. There is also great similarity in these two faiths in training scholars and investing them with respectability. As the rabbi can invest his disciple with respectability by awarding him *Semikha*, in the same way our trainee scholars are taught and trained by older scholars who finally give them their seal of approval that allows the younger scholars to be on their own. The clergy as an institution had no sanction in Judaism, nor did Islam keep any scope for papacy or ancestor worship. However, it was essential for those investing Talmud with respectability that they must also accord a special position of extraordinary reverence and holiness to its compilers. That is why, in Talmud, the religious leaders of the Israelites accorded the Judaic Jurists the same status as that of prophets like Moses, Aaron and Samuel. The Israeli people were told that just as it was obligatory for them to show due reverence to the above prophets, in the same way the religious leaders of the time should also be shown similar reverence.<sup>21</sup> In Islam too, the literature on Jurisprudence would not have enjoyed status it did if the jurists were not declared to be invested with a special mantle of holiness and deserving of reverence. Such notions gained currency amongst us due to such feeble traditions as 'الشيخ في قومه كالنبي في أمته' which means that the cleric has the same status among his own disciples as the prophet has among his. With reference to another Hadith it was asserted: 'The scholars among my followers are like the prophets of the Israelites.' Someone declared, 'If one wants to sit by Allah he should sit beside the mystics.' In this way, as far as practice is concerned, like Judaism, an institution of the sacred scholars came into being in Islam as well, who were accorded the status of genuine sources for interpreting the Revelations.

It is difficult to say this with certainty how far the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence were impacted upon by the Talmudic literature. However, this is a historically proven fact that in the initial centuries when rules of governance were being formulated, not only that the leaders drew on the conventional system of

governance in the Roman and the Iranian empires – for example, the system of collecting revenues – but also they tried to keep intact many of the political and economic processes by removing the elements of injustice in them. During Omer's caliphate one could see evidence of the adoption of the second model, which was a healthy one and accommodated dissent. By then the Judaic scholars had compiled the Talmud. They were experts in the art of synthesis through juxtaposition of the written and oral Torahs, and had a tradition of hair-splitting debates on even very trivial issues, of marshalling facts and sayings in support of their arguments. It will not be entirely illogical to hazard the conjecture that when they embraced Islam they brought with them some elements of their tradition. In the later centuries, during the Abbasid period, when the Islamic land became the center of Judaic scholarship, the impact of Islamic Jurisprudence could be seen clearly in the religious thinking of the Israelites. Moses Maimonides, considered as a milestone in modern Judaic thinking, shows clear impact of the methodology of Islamic Jurisprudence and the Muslim philosophical speculations in its method of *tatbeeq*. That is why we cannot ignore the possibility that in the initial phase of Islam the neo-Muslim Jewish scholars had left their impact on the methodology of Islamic Jurisprudence. In the terminology of Jurisprudence, *Halacha* that means 'the path', is the same as Shariah. We have already alluded to the traditions that had the status of Oral Torah or *wahi ghair matlu*. In the Talmudic literature, after the book and the traditions, consensus has a key role. It is regarded as a basic value and an important process of resolving issues. Consensus, i.e., the common will of the people, is so important in Talmud that sometimes it may transform the investigation of a case.<sup>22</sup> Among us too, in an effort to give consensus a halo of sacredness it was said that the followers of Muhammad could not go astray by means of consensus. Similarly, welfare or reform of the people is a much-acclaimed value among the Talmudic scholars in their principles of Jurisprudence. A comparable status has been given to customs and traditions that had so much importance in Talmud that it gave rise to the dictum, 'custom annuls law.' Customs and traditions, habits and conventions can change a textual ruling (*nuss*), or at least, for the time being, it can suspend the ruling of Shariah.

A striking similarity between the two traditions pertains to giving a touch of sacredness to the literature on Jurisprudence. Like Talmud, in our case also, the judgments of the four imams and the texts of Islamic Jurisprudence compiled by them have a kind of sacred hallow around them, and are considered beyond criticism and revaluation. For the later jurists, it was considered enough that they should write commentaries on the interpretation of their predecessors, and draw on their knowledge

to chart out their paths. The work that was done on Revelations in terms of reflection and understanding in the first three or four centuries was considered definitive and valid for all times to come. In the Judaic tradition, an analogous status is enjoyed by *Tannaim*, the first-generation scholars who are credited with formulating the principles for the interpretation of Torah, and about whom it is generally said that because of their vast erudition and insight they were equipped to lay the principles interpretation for all time to come. The treasure that they left in the form of *Halacha*, a result of their deep reflection and contemplation, is regarded in the Judaic circles as immutable and definitive. Then come *Amoraim*, the second generation of scholars and finally the *Saboraim*, the last generation of the divinely accredited scholars. Though there is a halo of sacredness around the later two generations too, in reality they are considered as legitimate extension of the *Tannaim*. The two generations following them do not enjoy the status of *Tannaim*, nevertheless, their share in the founding of *Halacha* cannot be downplayed. To invest this period encompassing three generations with a halo of sacredness is an act that has similarity with the status we accord to the imams and the *mujtahids*.<sup>23</sup> This finds partial echo in the feeble Hadith, 'خير القرون قرني ثم الذين يلونهم ثم الذين يلونهم'. The creative attitude discernible in the initial centuries regarding texts of Jurisprudence and sunnah got stagnated later. The later generations found no other safe way except blind imitation (*taqleed*). The later jurists found themselves compelled to join any of the four established schools of thought. Their job seemed to consist of further spreading and promoting the school of thought to which he had aligned himself. It seems that the barrier put up around the Revelations through extremely stringent conditions laid down for discrimination and prudence (*tafaqqoh & tadabbur*) in both the traditions became insurmountable with the passage of time. For all practical purposes, the Qur'anic revelations were also reduced to a mere book of commandments like Pentateuch.

It is not only that Jurisprudence was accepted as the perfect means of derivation of the operative cause of a ruling or judgment (*istikhrāj*) but also it led to a situation where human explanation and interpretation obscured the real import of the Revelations. Take for instance the Judaic tradition. The Torah quite explicitly forbids any work on the day of Sabbath. It was stressed in no uncertain terms that the Sabbath should be free of worldly activities. The Jewish scholars of Jurisprudence compiled a list of activities that could be called 'work.' The Talmud carries a list of 39 activities, which includes such acts as using the hammer or carrying an object from one place to another. Ostensibly, it might appear that such a classification or listing was done to make the commandment about Sabbath more intelligible and convenient to the

common man. However, when debates began about the details of each activity, they led to a wider scope of license. For instance, the details that were incorporated in the *Mishnah* about carrying objects from one place to another were sought to be understood in four ways. This one activity, i.e., carrying an object from one place to another may lead to four situations. For example, let us suppose that a beggar is standing outside a house while the householder is inside it, and in that situation the beggar holds out his hand and gives something to the householder, or takes something from the householder's hands, and then takes his hand out. In such a situation, it would be considered that the beggar has violated the commandment regarding the Sabbath. The householder, however, would not be considered to have committed a sin. On the contrary, if the householder extends his own hand and puts something in the beggar's hand, or takes something from the beggar and draws his hand in, in that situation the householder would be thought to have committed sin, and the beggar would be considered innocent. Of course, if the beggar thrusts his hand inside and then the householder takes something from it or puts something in it, then both of them would escape sin. Conversely, if the householder thrusts out his hand and the beggar either takes something from it or puts something in it, and then the householder draws in his hand, in such a situation both of them would be considered to have committed sin.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a simple command of Torah has not only been rendered incredibly complex through juristic hair splitting, but also it indicated the ways in which both the parties involved could escape sin. If we look at it closely, we will find that it was only a subtle way of subverting the commandment through the smokescreen of the process of analysis and codification. We have also a surfeit of such debates in the books of Islamic scholars with reference to 'stratagem' (*heyil*). To illustrate this point, we take just one example from Imam Ghazali's book *Kimiya-e Sa'adat*. The Imam opines that to tell a lie is not permissible as it influences the mind and darkens the heart. However, if anyone tells a lie as part of a stratagem while knowing in his heart that it is reprehensible, then it is not strictly forbidden, for, according to the Imam, when he would tell a lie with a good intention, his heart would not darken because of it.<sup>25</sup> He has written, with reference to Imam Sha'bi that when someone came to call on Imam Sha'bi, he would instruct his maid, 'Go and make a circle on the door, and then put your finger in the center of the circle and say – the Sheikh is not here. Or tell him (the visitor) – look for him in the mosque.'<sup>26</sup> Some people extended this process in order to get relief from some obligatory duties. One famous example of this stratagem is that of the famous religious scholar, Makhdoom al-Mulk Abdullah Sultanpuri in Akbar's court who, in order to get immunity from

*zakat*, would make over the entire property to his wife at the end of the year, and then would get it back through the same process. This is a classic example of how a rule of the Shariah could be subverted through the process of Jurisprudence.

It is not only that the barrier of interpretive literature around the Revelations has turned the faith into a book of commandments, but by according absolute right to human understanding and interpretation, and considering the human process of deduction as unfailing, it has often given rise to all kinds of debates about the processes, or sometimes about a particular process. This has predictably led to serious disputes among the jurists. One found different, even conflicting and contradictory, views about the same issue among the jurists. For the common people, it became difficult to understand which was Allah's real commandment, and what was the real import of the Qur'an. The Israelites took it to be a blessing and a convenience to come across different views about the same issue in the Talmud, as it allowed them to pick the view that suited them at that moment. More or less a similar situation obtained in the corpus of the four imams. For instance, about women's education, the view of one of the Talmudic scholars was that it was obligatory on each person to educate his daughters on the Torah. As opposed to this, another scholar opined that teaching the Torah to one's daughter was like teaching her adultery. One Israeli jurist expressed the view that the statement in the Torah, 'Ye shall teach them your children' (Deut XI-19) was really meant for boys only, not for daughters. There is also this statement in the Torah, 'It is better to burn it in the fire rather than teach it to women.'<sup>27</sup> When one juxtaposes such opposing views, it becomes clear that the Torah could not have propagated both the views. Of course, it is extremely convenient in the sense that a person can pick that view from the Talmud that is most suitable to him. One who supports female education and one who opposes it can both be seen to be perfect adherents of the Torah.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, if a man vows to severe sexual relationship with his wife, then, according to the Shammai school of thought, he should get back to normal relationship within two weeks, if he so intends. But the Hillel school of thought does not allow more than a week for this.<sup>29</sup> In the Torah, it is said in support of divorce, that if a man does not find any gleam of love and affection in his wife's eyes, and finds indecency there, he can divorce her.<sup>30</sup> The interpretation of this statement that is found in Mishnah makes the principles of divorce extremely complex. According to the Shammai school of thought, as long as there is no clear indication of indecency, one should not think about divorce. As opposed to this, according to the Hillel school of thought, if the wife shows inefficiency in cooking, this can be taken as a proof of indecency. Rabbi Akiva goes even further than this and extends the meaning of



indecent to an extraordinary extent by asserting that if the husband is able to find a more beautiful woman, then the lack of beauty in his wife can also be included in the category of indecency and the husband will be justified in divorcing her.<sup>31</sup> These kinds of disputes and disagreements are there in plenty in our own books of jurisprudence as well. Among the Hanafites, if the triple *talaq* severs the relationship between the husband and the wife, according to the Ahl-al-Hadith school, it will be regarded as only one *talaq*, which will keep the scope for a revival and repair of the relationship. Even in the case of obligatory prayers, the differing views of the imams have led to serious disputes. According to Abu Hanifa, the *qirat* is obligatory only in the first *rakah*, whereas Shafei thinks that *qirat* is obligatory in all the *rakahs*. As opposed to this, Malik opines that *qirat* is obligatory in the first three *rakahs*, whereas Hasan Basari's view is that it is obligatory only in the first *rakah*. And so on and so forth. From this extensive repertoire of juristic interpretations, one can pick up his own choice of the imam and the interpretations. Some Islamic scholars, of course, laid down the condition that it is not proper to pick and choose from multiple schools of thought just for the sake of convenience. According to them, one should stay loyal to only a specific school of thought. However, if all these schools of jurisprudence, in all their dimensions, stand for the genuine interpretation of the Revelation, then there seems to be no plausible reason as to why they should not be seen in their entirety and why a wider choice from them should be treated as license or escapism. The fact is – when Revelation is given flesh and blood at the level of juristic interpretations, or instead of using it as a light to illuminate one's path, it is given the form of codified laws, then the inaccessibility of human intellect becomes apparent in all its dimensions. The same light that once illuminated the path of human beings becomes fetters that bind them. The Israelites had put on such fetters in the form of the Talmud; the light of their spiritual life had extinguished because of the sayings and actions of their jurists. What had remained was only the outward form that was devoid of any light. The verse – 'مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْجِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا [62:5]', in effect, gives expression to this fact. The job of the Prophet was to relieve the Israelites from the burden of their arbitrary and whimsical interpretation of the Revelation, which they were carrying on their shoulders. This was not certainly the purpose of the Revelation – وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ – وَالْأَعْلَالِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ [7:157]. What a pity that the Prophet who had come to relieve people of this unwanted burden, has had his own followers build a barrier around the clear fountain of the Revelation. To pull down this barrier is, by itself, a great challenge now.

The evolution of the Messianic literature in Islam and the barrier of human knowledge around the Revelation led to a situation similar to the ones encountered by the followers of the earlier prophets, a telling example among them being the case of the Israelites. There is also evidence to the fact that the leading Companions had a premonition of this danger right from the beginning. This is the reason why in the periods of the first two caliphs, the Muslim society adopted a cautionary attitude towards traditions. At that time *sunnah* meant established conventions that were taken to be definitive and reliable in the interpretation and explanation of the Revelation. Later, when the traditions of single narrators (*khabar ahad*) created a situation of disagreement and disputations, Caliph Omer had to take a strong stand on it. So much so that he had to serve this warning on those who were showing excessive zest in gathering and compiling the sayings of the Prophet that they should not lay the foundation of another Mishnah in the faith of Muhammad. It is said that Abu Bakar had prepared a volume of about 500 traditions consisting of the Prophet's sayings in the written form. But he did not dare complete a process that he himself discouraged. Historians say that after a good deal of thought and reflection on the matter he finally decided to destroy it. A detailed discussion about these processes will come in the chapter on traditions.

One consequence of making the Revelations subservient to human understanding and juristic debates is that the Revelation that once defined Man's relationship with Allah and that illuminated the path to the future was transformed into a soulless cultural inheritance. The resulting effect of considering the knowledge of the earlier scholars, particularly the four imams, as final was that the Muslim society began to be governed not by living intellects but by dead souls who, despite their vast erudition and profundity of thoughts, were not able to look into the present and anticipate the future. Thus, the grandeur of Revelation got frozen and it became a prey to lifeless rituals. Once the light of the Revelation got hidden behind the clouds of superstitions and mindless imitation (*taqlaed*), it was natural for the community to feel that it had lost its path. It is the same familiar process through which the earlier communities had lost their positions. A detailed perspective on this is available in a series of Revelations in the Qur'an relating to the followers of the earlier prophets. If we look at the Qur'anic statements from this historical perspective pertaining to the Israelites and the Muslims, it would not be difficult to figure out the causes of our decline.

Before the Muslim community, the Israelites were the chosen people of God, as evidenced in the Qur'an: *يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيْ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاِنِّيْ فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلٰى الْعٰلَمِيْنَ* [2:47]. Allah awarded the Israelites the position of the chosen people and on the basis of this

august position extracted a promise from them. The Qur'an describes it as follows: وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَقْرَزْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ. ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَارَىٰ تُفَادُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجَهُمْ ۖ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ۗ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ [2:84-85]. Even in the sacred book of the Israelites, i.e., the Torah (Exodus), Allah's promise to them in the light of their privileged position finds mention, that if the community of the Israelites obeyed the commands of Allah in practice and acted in accordance with the covenant, they would be regarded as a special treasure to Allah, among all other peoples.<sup>32</sup> This was the privileged position of the Israelites and their glorious past history. Allah's blessings on them were numerous, about which the Qur'an makes copious and repeated references. It is no mean honor for a community to be recognized by Allah as the most favored among all the communities of the world, for the job of prophethood. The sacred books of the Israelites attribute this privileged position to the fact that Allah had invited all the communities of the world to come forward and accept the book, but no other community except that of the Israel was ready to take upon itself this onerous responsibility. The Judaic scholars interpret verse 7:24 of the Exodus in that way. In every synagogue, before the reading of the Torah the Israelites recited a prayer which alludes to the honorable position of the community by referring to the Torah: O God Almighty, only You are deserving of praise, you are Lord of the universe who gave us an honorable position among all communities and gave us the Torah.<sup>33</sup> The Israelites too accept the fact that the Torah is a valued treasure in their lives, and it is through this text that their superiority over the whole world is established. This is the document that places them in the position of the chosen community. However, despite the fact that the Torah has such a seminal position in their life, and is an inalienable part of their faith, this is also an established fact that their entire history does not provide any evidence of gaining light directly from it. Firstly, they allowed the genuine Torah to go waste. According to their own scholars and researchers, the current Torah is a product of the period after the second destruction of the Temple (70 CE). One can find internal evidence of this in the concluding part of the last book (Deuteronomy) of Pentateuch, that this text had come into being as a result of the efforts to protect the genuine Torah. In other words, the grandeur of the divine light that was received in the form of Moses' tablets was, to a considerable extent, lost. Secondly, whatever could be retrieved orally or in the form of incomplete and shabby manuscripts and were compiled in five books, were amplified so much by the Judaic scholars with their own comments and statements that Jesus Christ was compelled to declare: O hypocritical

Jurists and Pharisees, you sift the mosquitoes and swallow the camels.<sup>34</sup> Around the distorted revelations the barrier of human interpretation and comments became so strong that the very purpose of the Revelation was lost in this maze of juristic speculations. The human tendency to verbal gymnastics got the better of the Revelation. It gave rise to a situation described in the Qur'an as follows *مِنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا* [4:46]. *يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ وَ يَقُولُونَ سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَ أَسْمَعُ غَيْرَ مُسْمِعٍ وَ رَاعِنَا لِيَأْتِيَ بِالسِّنِّيهِمْ وَ طَعَنَّا فِي الدِّينِ*.

When they allowed the light of the Revelations to dissipate, there was no reason why the community that was privileged on its strength should not face dismissal from its privileged position. Time and again they were warned about the worsening situation; they were constantly reminded about God's wrath that is visited upon a chosen community because of its repeated mistakes and refractory behavior. The *Book of Amos* contains fearful descriptions of such warnings: that God makes the ground under the feet of disobedient people too hot; that God is All-powerful, and He would trace out the rebel even if he hides on the peak of Mount Carmel, and if he goes to take shelter under the bottom of the sea He would command the serpent to sting him to death, and if he goes to the enemies as a prisoner He would command the sword to slaughter him. According to the Book of Amos, God declares, 'I would cast my fiercest glare at such people, and would not look at them with kindness'.<sup>35</sup> The same community of chosen people that once enjoyed the status of the leadership of all communities, because of its vanity and evil doings, drives itself to such a situation when it cannot find shelter either on water or on land. And God does not want to have the sight of them. This is the terrible fate that awaits the people of the disgraced community. In the words of the Qur'an – *وَصُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَ بَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ* [2:61]. If the followers of the Book wash their hands off the purpose of the Prophethood, then they embrace disgrace and dishonor as their inevitable destiny. And who can help those on whom God turns His back? *أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَ مَنْ يَلْعَنِ اللَّهُ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ نَصِيرًا* [4:52].

In the foregoing discussion we have focused on how the impact of human interpretation can transform the Revelations from human good into damnation. We have also endeavored to point out how due to some historical and cultural reasons we, too, like the Israelites, built a barrier around the Revelations that led to a situation where the attitude of most of the Muslims towards Revelations became subservient to history, traditions and the understanding of the predecessors. Direct access to the Revelation began to be considered a dangerous thought and a reprehensible act (*bid'ah*). The understanding of the predecessors was considered final and it became impossible for living people to illuminate their mind and heart with the light of the

divine Word. The processes of interpretation found in Mishnah, Madrash, Halacha and Kabalah and their Islamic version penetrated so deep in our historical and cultural terrain that we were not even aware that they were alien to Islam. Gradually, the illuminating splendor of the Revelations got hidden behind complex juristic principles, unnecessary verbal gymnastics and debates and investigation into and detailed discussion about the principle of transmission of tradition (*rijal*). History, tradition, psychology, philosophy and alien thoughts and ideas made their way into religious thinking to such an extent that the ancillary knowledge or supporting literature took the place of real knowledge of the faith. It became difficult to have access to the divine Word without crossing this barrier of human knowledge. And as it was not possible for most people to cross this barrier, for all practical purposes, the process of deriving guidance from Revelation was as good as dead. In these circumstances, it was not possible that, deprived of its heavenly and visionary treasures, or in other words, after making them captives to human interpretation, the followers of Muhammad would still enjoy the status of Allah's most favored people. To understand this expected decline and dismissal from the earlier privileged position it is necessary to recount the distortions in perspectives and the deviations from the appointed path that took place as a consequence of making Revelations subservient to human comments and interpretation. This is a process that had crept among Muslims just as it had crept among the Israelites before them, and it became difficult to break this barrier.

As pointed out earlier, the superior status was accorded to the Israelites due to their being upholders of the Torah. There was no other reason for their privileged status among all the peoples of the world except the fact that they were entrusted with the task of realizing the purpose of Prophethood. However, when the light of the Revelations went out of their lives and they betrayed the trust reposed in them, they had to face God's wrath. Those who were the custodians of the Revelations a little while ago became, as a result of their ideological distortions, guilty of deviations from it: *فَبِمَا نَقَضْتُمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَسِيئَةً يَحِزُّونَ الْكَلِمَةَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ*: [5:13]. When they lost the light of the divine Word or made it captive to their own interpretations, it inevitably gave rise to disagreements and disputations. With reference to the Christians, this mutual rivalry has been described in the Qur'an as follows: *وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرِي أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَهُمْ فَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا فَأَعْرَبْنَا بَيْنَهُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ* [5:14].

The most pitiable thing about the people who have fallen from heights is that they are unable to recognize the real nature of their fall. According to the poet Muhammad Iqbal:

دائے ناکامی متاع کارواں جاتا رہا      کارواں کے دل سے احساسِ زیاں جاتا رہا

*Woe to the great failure! The treasure of caravan is lost.*

*And the sense of loss too ebbed out of the caravan.*

To lose even the sense of loss is the most painful stage of decline. The circumstances around change right before one's eyes. The events and incidents proclaim it loud and clear: You are no longer what you had been earlier. But the heady presumption of being the most privileged community and being the crown of all communities prevent the members from having a cognisance of the reality on the ground. As the deposed community, instead of seeing its image in the Revelations, it likes to see its image in the interpretation of Revelations where the distortions are not brought home to it. The writings of the pious elders promise them that in order to remain in the position of the privileged community mere external rituals are enough. The Muslim scholars of the world laid down conditions for being a Muslim, and for this they codified juristic laws for people's guidance. If one adhered to them, they asserted, there would be no doubt about their being Muslims, or that no one could accuse them of the betrayal of promise, as far as the purpose of Prophethood was concerned. When faith has its manifestation in codified books, the disgraced community not only fails to recognise its decline, but also it fails to understand why it lost its grip on history. It just has a vague feeling that it has lost many things on the way, but it cannot muster up courage enough to give it a voice. In fact, it can barely come to grips with this feeling of loss.

Faced with such a situation the community concentrates its efforts on how to bridge the gulf between the ideal and the actual by means of elucidation and interpretation. Anyway, the position of the privileged community is a functional one. The community that abdicates its responsibility to carry out the purpose of Prophethood cannot remain in that position. For Allah, blessings and rewards are related to the purpose of Prophethood. Be it the community of Israelites or that of Muslims, they cannot deserve this honour once they abdicate their responsibilities. To accept this simple fact becomes difficult for those communities that create the fence of human interpretation around the Revelations, which lead them on the way to – 'يُحَرِّفُونَ' – 'الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ' [5:13]. The false elucidations prevent the deposed communities from recognizing their fall. They tell them – You are Allah's most favored treasure, the privileged followers, your superior status vis-à-vis the rest of the world is well established. So what if your worldly life is not as it should be, your afterlife is safe and secure! So what if the history has slipped out of your hands in matters of Shariah, a host of activities are still in your hands, or at least they are in harmony with your interpretations! Instead of making a hard-headed assessment of the fallen state, the

pivot of thinking in the deposed community revolves around convincing people that the current state of insult, injury and disgrace is, in fact, the fate of the true believers in the world, and the blessings and rewards that Allah has promised to the favored community are shifted from life in this world to the Hereafter. It is a great shift at the level of perspective that, in fact, calls for a new theology that makes it imperative that an all-round atmosphere of complacency and wishful thinking be put in place.

For a community, faith is like a mission. If the faith undergoes change or if there is discrepancy in the interpretation, it will certainly bring an attitudinal change towards life in its members. The privileged position of the Israelites or the status of Muslims as the last favored community points to the fact that now the world history would chart its way under the leadership of this community. First the Israelites and then the Muslims were ensconced on the throne of world leadership. Apart from rewards in the afterlife, the sovereign position and honor in this world is also a part of this package. The kingdom of David and Solomon, a return to which is still longed for by the Israelites, is, in fact, an instance of how the reign of history is given in the hands of prophets. يَا دَاوُدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ [38:26]. After the enthronement of David in the position of prophethood it was expected of him that he discharged the responsibilities of the state in the light of the Revelations, i.e. remain steadfast in the way of truth and justice. After the deposition of the Israelites from the privileged position, Muslims were placed in the position of the privileged community and they were given the responsibility of leading the world and recreating human society in accordance with the Revelations. 'وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ ' [2:143] is, in fact, an account of the historic event when an entire community was appointed to the task of carrying out the purpose of prophethood, and the honor of the sovereign position in the world till the doomsday was conferred on them. The phrase 'the just followers' (*ummat-e wast*) points to a fair and just order, which is an inalienable part of blessings contained in the Revelations. When the Revelations are put in practice in the right spirit it gives rise to a just order that accommodates criticism and revaluation, which, in their turn, saves the Revelations from being buried under the weight of human interpretations. One compliments the other.

When the Muslim community was placed in the position of the chosen people, it could not realize, by any stretch of imagination, that as the last custodian of the Revelations it was being given a treasure of spirituality or cultural inheritance. In the perspective of the kingships of David and Solomon, and the superiority of the Israelites over all other communities, it was apparent from whatever was being given to them

(Muslims) that from now onwards they were being appointed as Allah's representatives on earth till the doomsday. After the Prophet's entry into Medina and the truce that he had entered into, it had become apparent that in all matters pertaining to this world or the next, the last Prophet and his followers had the final say. The fall of the two super powers of the time – the Roman and the Persian empires – had been anticipated in the Qur'an. It was as though the point was being driven home that after the emergence of the Prophet of Arabia, the arbiter of the right and wrong in the world would be the Prophet himself and then his followers. The fall of the Persian and the Roman empires was a foregone conclusion, as the followers of Muhammad had been placed in the position of the chosen people. The concept of the chosen community was related to rewards both in this world and the Hereafter. The Muslims tended to think that as Allah had declared them His chosen people, no powers in the world could stand before them. To govern was their religious duty. They witnessed with their own eyes the message of – 'وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ' [3:139] taking practical shape in the world. This strength of conviction had lent their individual and collective life a meaning and a mission. A strong sense of responsibility in the duty of governance and the promise of victory in this world and the Hereafter had filled their lives with such passion and fervor that they formed an invincible force, more than a match even to the mightiest power in the world.

However, as our attitude towards Revelations began to change, which gradually led to our decline, we tried to change our beliefs regarding the chosen people to bring it in harmony with our changing circumstances. We shifted from this world to the next the promise of success and dominance promised by Allah, and invented such beliefs for ourselves that, despite our current state of penury and humiliation, would still allow us to see ourselves as the chosen people. We left the tasks of the world to others and limited our concerns only to the Hereafter. Then we gave birth to all those wishful thinkings that were once the hallmark of the Jewish thought. The material world and its tasks were compared to the animal bone sucked by dogs. We chose for ourselves the gifts of the next world, even though all the rewards in the next world were promised as a consequence of fulfilling the purpose of prophethood in this world. We ignored this fact and declared our birth right on those rewards. New formulations were invented about rewards in the Hereafter as a result of renouncing the present world. A philosophy of renunciation came in vogue that has been denounced in the Qur'an with reference to Christians, something that led them to give up the divine Word of the Bible and get mired in apostasy: *وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقًّا*: *رَعَايَتِهَا، فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَسِقُونَ* [57:27].



As a consequence of regarding the status of the chosen people as a spiritual position and shifting the promised reward in this world and the Hereafter wholly to the next world, a fundamental transformation took place in the attitude and worldview of the community. The deposed people now declared their current state of decline as their appointed fate. As the community did not feel the sense of loss intensely at any time there was no realistic and concerted effort for a return to the earlier position. On the contrary, this belief gained ground that the material world had slipped out of the hands of the men of faith, and what was there in it, after all? The men of faith should, in fact, concern themselves with the Hereafter where eternal rewards were waiting for them. All those blessings and rewards that were contingent upon their fulfilling the purpose of the prophethood were de-linked from that purpose, and a new environment of wishful thinking and complacency became the fate of Muhammad's followers. Gradually, these wishful longings became so widespread that they almost attained the status of belief. This was not something entirely new, as the Israelites and the Christians had already fallen victims to such wishful thinking. After their deposition from the sovereign position, as time passed the chosen people lost their enterprise and turned to fatalism for consolation.

The honorific of 'chosen people' that was once related to the group striving for actualizing the purpose of prophethood was now turned into a label of group identity. Like the earlier peoples such as the Israelites and the Christians who took their group identity of Judaism or Christianity as the only means of their salvation, this belief gained ground amongst us as well that every Muslim, sooner or later, rewarded or penalized, would eventually go to heaven. However, the Qur'an has rejected in unambiguous terms this notion of group identity: ' وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا ۗ قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ ' [2:135], *إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا* that it does not concern itself to either Judaism or Christianity or the current Muslimness. Rather, it concerns itself with the establishment of the righteous faith among man and its promotion. But, like the Israelites and the Christians we have also taken it for granted that as the Muslims are the chosen people of Allah, they are destined to receive his forgiveness and blessings, although the promise of forgiveness and rewards was made not to the so-called Muslims, Israelites or Christians but to those who were the true flag bearers of the purpose of prophethood. Nevertheless, those who wore this purpose of prophethood merely as an ideological badge, did not find it difficult to make space for themselves among the recipients of Allah's blessings and rewards. What can be a more telling example of – *يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ* [5:13] than this? However, this assumption has been negated at many places and on many occasions, and in so many ways, pointing out that the only

recipient of Allah's blessings and rewards are those who act according to His wishes, not any particular sect or community. ' إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئُونَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ ' [5:69]. 'وَالْيَوْمَ الْأَجْرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

The Israelites, who had lost their way and who were undergoing humiliation and suffering because of their dismissal from the sovereign position, had latched on to their glorious past in such a way that they did not realize what enormous changes had taken place in the world. They considered themselves deserving of paradise because of their earlier privileged position, and if ever they reflected on their negligence they consoled themselves with the thought that the fire of hell could never touch them. And even if they were thrown to hell, it would be for a small while only. ' ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَنْ نَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا ' [3:24]. 'أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ'. In the books related to God's blessings, there were such guarantees regarding the salvation of the Israelites that on the Day of Judgment Abraham would prevent any circumcised Israelite from being thrown into hell. This foregrounding of the group or communitarian identity by the Israelites as the chief cause for their salvation led to a total degeneration of their intellectual and moral fiber. If a group of people thinks that their life in the Hereafter is secure, they lack any incentive to look at their own mistakes and rectify them. There remains no urgency to approach God, and no burning desire to illuminate one's path and re-orient oneself in the light of the Revelations. The collective life of the community rumbles on recklessly on the highway to decline, and a situation is created that is alluded to in the Qur'an as follows: ' قَبَّأُو ' [2:90]. 'يَغْضَبُ عَلَىٰ غَضَبٍ، وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

This was an account of the atmosphere of complacency among the Israelites. Now we might glance at this mirror to see the image of the Muslim community. One feels clearly that it was as though the state of the Muslim community was being described in the above verse. In spite of abdicating our responsibility towards the purpose of prophethood, this belief is strong among the majority of Muslims that the last destination of each member of the Muslim community is paradise. This belief has been made so strong through adducing traditions and the statements of Elders that we have presumed that whatever our actions, whether we have remained steadfast to the promise made to Allah or not, whether we hold the position of the best community or not, as we have once uttered the profession of faith – *la ilaha illallah* – we are bound to go to paradise. Some weak traditions have played a seminal role in strengthening this belief. One such weak tradition goes so far as to assert that -- 'من قال لا اله الا الله ' -- 'دخل الجنة'. Someone asked – would the person go to heaven even if he commits theft and adultery? The answer was reported to be – yes! It is said that the person asked the

question thrice and the answer was in the affirmative, even if it was very hard for the questioner (Abuzar) to digest the answer.<sup>36</sup>

Ashraf Ali Thanavi has written this with reference to a Hadith that on the Day of Judgment Allah would mitigate the punishment of men of faith. When acts of his sins and disobedience would be recounted, it would seem as though he would be ruined. Then Allah would say, 'Go. We ignored your sinful acts while you lived in the world, We do the same now.'<sup>37</sup> This is the kind of self-complacent thinking that, through the validation of one of our foremost religious leaders, has become a part of our faith. It is on the basis of such faith that we have assumed our community identity or group identity to be the grounds for our salvation.

If Abraham can be seen to have been activated in Talmud for the salvation of the Israelites, we have also created the image of the Prophet as our chief mediator for salvation on the Day of Judgment. Allah the Almighty, the very embodiment of fairness and justice, would make a thorough investigation of everyone's sin and merit: فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ. وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ [99:7-8]. To expect that on the Day of Judgment he would be partial to one community vis-à-vis other communities is to live in fool's paradise. As a matter of fact, this has already been made clear that – لَيْسَ بِأَمَانِيكُمْ وَلَا أَمَانِي أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا يُجْزَى بِهِ وَلَا يَجِدْ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا [4:123]. Despite all these clarifications the Muslims, like the People of the Book before them, have declared their Prophet to be the intercessor for sinners. The Qur'anic verses that were revealed to serve as a reprimand to the followers of earlier prophets for such wishful thinking were interpreted in a way to yield quite the opposite meaning.

That day would indeed be a harsh one, the day of justice; that day things would appear as they are, in their naked form. The day when everyone will have to present himself with his actions: فَأَلْيَوْمَ لَا يُظَلِّمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ [36:54]. The day of the final judgment about which the Qur'an says: 'Fear the day on which no one would be able to save another through his mediation and when no intercession would be accepted'. No one would be able to get relief through paying any penalty nor would be able to save himself: وَأَنْتُمْ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ [2:48]. That day none will get a helper nor an intercessor: مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ [40:18].

In the Qur'an whenever forgiveness is mentioned, it has been stressed that on the Day of Judgment what would come to one's rescue before Allah's presence are one's good actions and not his dreamy, wishful thinking. Who would dare to open his lips before Him without his permission? 'مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ' [2:255]. When people would be raised again that day, the assembly before Allah would be a solemn one and

all would be in awe of His grandeur. There would be such panic that even rows upon rows of angels there would not dare to speak, except when they are asked, or they are permitted by Allah: *يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا*: [78:38]. To think that on the day which is known as the Day of Judgment when the Chief Judge would deliver justice one could get relief through intercession or to say that God's decision could change through mediation would, in fact, tantamount to a denial of the Qur'an's fundamental message. However, the reality is that now a major segment of the Muslim community, more or less, has come to believe in this non-Qur'anic concept that on the Day of Judgment decisions would change because of the Prophet's interceding.

The Qur'an makes it clear that it is simply beyond the power of the Prophet to mitigate anyone's sin or punishment: *'فُلْنِي لِي لَا أَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا رَشَدًا'* [72:21]. What to speak of interceding on behalf of others, the Prophet himself is dependent on Allah: *قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ. وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ لَاسْتَكْتَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ. إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ* [7:188]. As opposed to this, in the realms of Muslim thought and belief, the Prophet has been placed in the position of the Chief Mediator who would guarantee forgiveness to all.<sup>38</sup> After him, some other prophets, and even pious and righteous figures have been stated to be a part of this forgiveness project. In some oral traditions, every Muslim has been given the right to intervene on behalf of the sinners to save them from hell, or at least have their penalty mitigated. *Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmizi* and *Musnad Ahmad* allude to the helplessness of other prophets who would have no power of intercession on behalf of their followers. According to these traditions, eventually Muhammad would undertake, with Allah's permission, the mission of Intercession.<sup>39</sup> As per an account in *Tirmizi*, once an angel put before the Prophet two alternatives: either he is awarded the right to intercession or the guarantee of heaven for half of his followers. According to this tradition, the Prophet opted for the right to intercession as this would accrue greater benefit.<sup>40</sup> A tradition attributed to Ali in *Musnad Firdaus* has it that when the verse – *'وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَى'* [93:5] was revealed, the Prophet said – as long as even one of my followers will be in hell, I shall not agree.<sup>41</sup> In one tradition, Muslims were given the guarantee of heaven orally thus – If a person names his newborn 'Muhammad', both the father and the son will go to heaven.<sup>42</sup> It is said that on that fateful day, a herald would announce – those who bear the name 'Muhammad' may enter heaven, because of the honor and prestige attached to this name.<sup>43</sup> About Allah's partiality to the followers of Muhammad and His special favors, people went so far as to assert that for the followers of other prophets, this is written in the supposed Protected Tablet – *'من أطاعه فله الجنة ومن عصى فله النار'* while for the followers of

Muhammad, the following is written there – *امةٌ مذنبَةٌ ورب غفور*.<sup>44</sup> The books related to Allah's blessings are filled with such wishful statements. The Qur'an has promised Muslims heaven as a reward for their good deeds: *أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَغْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ* [3:142], but human interpretations of the divine Word made salvation a monopoly of Muslim nation. Like the Israelites, the Muslims too created the concept of a God who is partial to one community, and a prophet who would guarantee forgiveness to sinners. So why bother if we lost control of this world, at least our hold on the Hereafter remains intact!

The claim by the Israelites that – *'نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ'* [5:18], and to consider themselves worthy of special consideration on the Day of Judgment point to the phenomenon of worshipping the past that prevails among the decadent and fallen communities. The desire to escape the harsh present compels the people of such communities to take refuge in their glorious past, and the critical nature of their circumstances actuates them to accept a state of permanent debasement in this world and keeps all their expectations for the next. The chosen community loses faith in the rough and tumble of the real world. As a consequence, the life of the community takes on the aspect of a mock play. It loses its glory and honor but it clings tenaciously to pompous phraseology. The place of prophethood is taken over by demagogy, and interpretive literature rather than the Revelation being considered the pinnacle of intellectual life. Gradually, the position of the most righteous leader is occupied by those having competing and contradictory ideas and the same community that was earlier leading an integrated and unified life in the light of the divine Word and could respond collectively as a body to issues becomes a victim of confusion and controversy as a result of the loyalty of different groups to different leaders. This mock play of community life is staged continually as the social life that seems to be based externally on the principles of *shariah* soon becomes a victim of the divisive forces in matters concerning both the material world and the spiritual life. The social and political life is predicated upon power-play, and that is why to sustain the mock play in the name of *shariah*, it becomes necessary to limit it to merely religious or spiritual affairs. Be it the Jewish Halacha or the Muslim juristic literature, a larger segment of them deals with the issues relating to guidance in spiritual and personal matters. As the distance from the seat of power increases more and more with the passage of time, the gaze of notable jurists shifts from social, political and collective life of the people and concentrates on the external rituals of spiritual and personal life. If there are long and interminable debates on Kosher in the interpretive literature of the Israelites in painful details relating to the arrangement of words, the choice of the animals, religious

sanctions regarding eating their meat etc. etc., we too have a tradition of long-winding debates and nit-picking regarding the same issues. As a substantial segment of life had slipped out of their grip, as the deprivation from power robbed them of the ability to transform collective life in direct response to the divine Word, these people who aspired to lead their worldly life in accordance with their faith, had to narrow down their focus to only spiritual and personal life. This separation of the worldly life and the spiritual life meant that the gulf that was created between the seat of power and the divine Word be given some religious justification. The fallen people amongst whom interpretive literature or external rituals soon replace the divine Word do not find it too difficult to come to terms with this divide. However, this is an established fact that once the process of secularization gains hold in collective life, it becomes difficult that leadership of the community should emerge out of it. Rather, people tend to feel that faith implies particular forms of worship and observing some external rituals, and that is all.

Secularization is the search for a new faith for the fallen people. The division between the collective life and personal life demands that the interpretive literature of the faith should not only accept the distortions in collective life, but also provide justifications for them. The interpretive literature of pontiffs and mystics is created in this period. As the tradition of direct access to the divine Word is snapped, people find justification for acceding to the distortions in collective life as they find some venerable leader or imam doing the same. The statement, *وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلُؤُونَ أَلْسِنَتَهُم بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ* [3:78] points to the malpractice of culling arguments in favor of wrong viewpoints, not merely to the game of tongue twisting. When the position of righteous leadership falls in the hands of clergy, not only distortions take place in the purpose of Revelations, but it gives rise to an environment where religious and spiritual leaders of all hues become ready to barter away the divine Word and the divine Promise at very small prices. *إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَا خَلَاقَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ* [3:77]. These religious leaders are such ruthless operators that they are ever ready to bring out edicts that run counter to the faith, and do not flinch from convincing people that these (edicts) are meant to promote the interest of the faith and improve the state of the community. This is the process which is described in the Qur'an as – *فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ* [2:79]. Muslims who are entrusted to uphold and fulfill the purpose of prophethood, despite all their pretension to religiosity, accept the lure of power and accede to its slavery. This tragedy is visited upon not on any ordinary group of human beings, but on those about whom the

Qur'an says – أَلَمْ تَر إِلَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا نَصِيحًا مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْجِبْتِ وَالطَّاغُوتِ وَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَؤُلَاءِ أَهْدَىٰ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَبِيلًا [4:51].

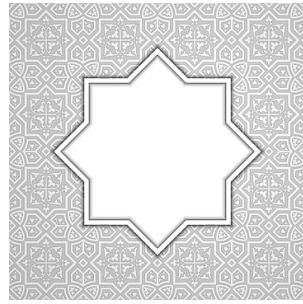
The process that the followers of earlier prophets went through -- from the dismissal from sovereign position to the slavery of those in power -- can now be seen to be repeated in the case of Muslims. After the debasement of the collective life and dismissal from the sovereign position, the external rituals that have gained acceptability among us in the name of religion, have more to do with human interpretation of the Revelation rather than the divine Word itself. An alternative concept of faith, away from the main tenets of our faith, has made its place in our religious thinking. In other words, a kind of Judaism has already entered Islam. What is left is a soulless structure of laws and edicts. The concept of faith at the popular level runs counter to the divine Word. To interrogate the assumptions and discriminating powers of pontiffs and mystics is a difficult task that does not seem to have any scope in the current Muslim thinking. In the foregoing centuries, if the movements that were built up around the Muslim world regarding *ijtihad* failed to chart a way despite utmost efforts, its chief cause was their lack of daring in challenging the canonization of the early centuries of Islam. *Ijtihad*, in the sense of igniting our thought directly from the Divine Word, could have become successful only if we had dared to take a critical and analytical look at our own intellectual and cultural inheritance. If the discriminatory judgments of the four imams are regarded as final and definitive, and the only means of reaching the truth, it would be difficult to escape the messianic barrier around the divine Word, and we would not be able to eject the elements of Judaism that have already entered our cultural and intellectual heritage. For the Israelites, for a return to the divine Word there was a practical problem -- whatever was present in the name of the divine Word, surrounded by *Mishnah*, was not there in its original form. On the contrary, with the Muslims the divine Word, however much surrounded by cultural inheritance and however much buried under history and traditions, is still intact. Unlike other communities, our problem is not that the light of the divine Word has extinguished in us, but that do we have enough courage to accept the challenge of the divine Word?





SECTION III

The Qur'an



# Demolishing the interpretative hedges around the Qur'an

﴿يَرْبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا﴾

In comparison with the earlier texts or scrolls, the Qur'an has this unique distinction that its Sender had taught the recipient the use of pen (عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ). Apart from its preservation through memorizing, special arrangements were made for its preservation through a written text. There is enough textual evidence to which we will allude later, where it has been referred to as a text within two covers. The word 'book' has been used for the Qur'an for about 70 times in the Book. It has been variously referred to as *Al-Kitab*, *Kitab Al-Mubeen*, *Kitab Al-Hakeem*, *Kitab Al-Azeez*. In surah Toor, it has been referred to as a 'Book on Parchment Paper' (وَكِتَابٍ مَّسْطُورٍ فِي رَقٍّ مَّنْشُورٍ). For such a planned, well thought-out and thoroughly executed book, our commentators believed in such unreliable and inauthentic traditions, which cast a shadow of doubt over such a document of faith. Disagreements on verses, loss of certain verses, tracing out some verses after a long search, and even after all this, the inability to incorporate all the verses in the Othmanic version – these are the yarns and anecdotes with which the Islamic exegetes filled the margins of their commentary books.

One of the traditions transmitted by Shahab Zahri goes so far as to claim that some verses of the Qur'an that were revealed could not be recorded as those who memorized them died in the Battle of Yamama – 'ولم يعلم بعدهم ولم يكتب' <sup>1</sup>. In other words, that part of the Qur'an to which only they were privy could not be incorporated in the text because of their death. *Ibn Maja* contains a tradition attributed to Ayisha that the verses related to stoning to death and relationship between foster mother and foster child (*radha't kabeer*) were eaten up by a goat when people were busy with the Prophet's funeral. That is why those verses could not be incorporated in the Qur'an. <sup>2</sup> Another reason for the verse related to stoning to death not finding entry into the Qur'an was purported to be the fact that at the time of compilation of the Qur'an whoever brought some part of the text had to produce a witness to verify it. Omer who

brought in the verse in question could not produce a witness for its verification. Hence it remained outside of the Qur'anic text.<sup>3</sup> *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* also mentions that according to Abdullah bin Mas'ud *muawwizatein* (surah Al-Falaq and surah Al-Naas) were not part of the Qur'an.<sup>4</sup> Regarding *muawwizatein*, it is recorded in *Bukhari* with reference to Ubai bin Ka'b that he used to read 'قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ' and 'قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ' without the prefatory *qul* ('say'). In other words, he would say -- 'أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ' and 'أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ'.<sup>5</sup> About Ubai bin Ka'b it was recorded that he used to read the verse -- 'وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّنا إِنَّه كان فاحشة ومقتا وساء سبيلا إلا من تاب' [17:32] as 'تَقْرَبُوا الزَّنا إِنَّه كان فاحشة وساء سبيلا'.<sup>6</sup> It is said that despite Omer's instruction to the contrary, he insisted on reading the verse in the same way. It was also said that Abdullah bin Masu'd would read the verse in Surah Al-Zariyat -- 'إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الرَّزَّاقُ ذُو الْقُوَّةِ الْمَتِينُ' [51:58] as 'إني أنا الرزاق'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, as regards the verse in Surah Al-Fath -- 'الْحَمِيَّةَ حَمِيَّةَ الْأَجَاهِلِيَّةِ فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَلْزَمَهُمْ كَلِمَةَ التَّقْوَى وَكَانُوا أَحَقَّ بِهَا وَأَهْلَهَا وَكَانَ لَوْ كَانُوا بَنِي آدَمَ وَادٍ لَابْتَغَى إِلَيْهِ تَانِيًا وَ لَوْ أُعْطِيَ إِلَيْهِ ثَالِثًا وَلَا -- 'يعمل خيرا فلن يكفر له'. The second part appended to the verse cannot be found in the Qur'an now.<sup>9</sup> It is recorded in *Tirmizi* that Abdullah bin Masu'd and Abu Darda used the verse -- 'وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى' in the Surah Wal Lail as 'والذكر والأنثى'.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, it is recorded in *Bukhari* that some people, particularly, Ibn Abbas<sup>11</sup> would add -- 'لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلاً مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ' [2:198]. There are such traditions recorded in *Al-Itqan*, *Kanz-ul Ummal* etc. that when Omer made enquiries about some verses, he was told, 'these verses were with the person who died in the battle of Yamama'.<sup>12</sup> At this Omer simply muttered -- 'إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون'.

These fanciful accounts that came in circulation after the first century hijra to prove that the Qur'an was a defective text made their way into the margins of interpretive literature. This not only engendered doubts into the minds of common people about the Divine Text, but it happened in many cases that the fabricated verses became a means of interpreting the original verses. For instance, if the majority of commentators today interpret the verse -- 'حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَى' [2:238] as pointing to 'صلوة العصر', then they cannot escape the allegation that they got this idea from the fabricated traditions where it was asserted that when Abu Bakr had it declared publicly that those who had any verse of the Qur'an with them should bring it over to him for compilation, then Hafsa had said, 'When you reach 'حافظوا على الصلوة الوسطى' then send

for me.' As the scribe reached 'حافظوا على الصلوة الوسطى' and she was sent for, she said, 'If you have reached 'حافظوا على الصلوة الوسطى' then write 'وهي صلوة العصر' after it. Omer objected, 'Do you have any proof of this additional part?' When no proof was presented, Omer declared, 'By Allah, something brought over by a woman without any proof or witness cannot be incorporated into the Qur'an.' And that part was not incorporated. However, even though the phrase, 'صلوة العصر' was not incorporated into the Qur'anic Text, Commentators till today generally take 'صلوة الوسطى' to mean 'صلوة العصر'.

Even though the earlier versions of the Qur'an or other hypothetical readings of it by the Prophet's Companions apart from the version compiled by Othman did not succeed in making inroads into the Qur'anic text, they (the fabricated verses) certainly influenced the way we understand and interpret the Qur'an. Even in the most reliable books of commentaries, there is evidence that the commentators have used the ideas and suggestions contained in the fabricated verses. For instance, verse 79 of surah Kahaf 'وكان امامهم يأخذ كل سفينة صالحة غصبا' – 'وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا' – according to the reading of Ibn Abbas, or the verse 'وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ' – 'وَكَانَ كَافِرًا' was prefixed. The impact of these fabricated verses can be gauged from the fact that in most of the old or new books of commentaries, it has been assumed that the young boy (*ghulam*) must be an infidel (*kafir*).<sup>13</sup>

In the *tafseer* as well as in hadith<sup>14</sup> literature, it is taken as an established fact that the present version of the Qur'an is the Othmanic version compiled by Abu Bakr with the advice of Zaid bin Thabit and Omer, after the death of the Prophet. Othman got copies of this version of the text made during his caliphate. It is also said that at the time when it was copied during the period of Othman some verses were traced out after long search and were incorporated into it. For example, only Abu Khuzaima or Huzaima was in possession of the last part of surah Bara'ah.<sup>15</sup> Some traditions mention that the verse – 'مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ...' – from surah 'Ahzaab' was lost.<sup>16</sup> It is also claimed that the concluding verses of surah 'Ahzaab' were not there in the version compiled by Abu Bakr. They were found after a thorough search during the caliphate of Othman and were incorporated.<sup>17</sup> Some traditions hold the Othmanic version was not simply claimed as an enlarged version of Abu Bakr, but totally deny the existence of any version by Abu Bakr at all! As it is reported by Ibn Sa'd and Mustadrak, according to Muhammad bin Sireen, the compilation of the Qur'an was not completed before the death of Omer.<sup>18</sup> According to these traditions, after the preparation of the Othmanic version of the Qur'anic Text, Othman had ordered that all other versions found in the Muslim world be destroyed or burnt so that no dispute or controversy arises in future.<sup>19</sup> By quoting and referring to such traditions and incorporating them into their books, our

scholars of traditions and the commentators have brought down an exalted and definitive text like that of the Qur'an to the level of the King James's version of the Bible.

The Othmanic version that is regarded as the enlarged version of Abu Bakr is said to have been compiled by Othman, Omer and Zaid bin Thabit. It is said that the main reason for the last two verses of surah 'Taubah' to be a part of that surah was the view expressed by Omer. He is reported to have said, 'if there were three verses, we would have incorporated them in a new surah.' As the verses were only two they were tagged on to surah 'Taubah.'<sup>20</sup> It was also claimed that while the Qur'an was being written down, adequate care was taken that the text conformed to the pattern of speech and convention of pronunciation prevalent among members of the Quraish tribe. According to these traditions, Othman's view was that as the text was revealed to a member of the Quraish tribe, it should be recorded according to the phonetics and speech conventions of that tribe. It has also been recorded that while copying the text Zaid bin Thabit remembered a particular verse of surah 'Ahzaab.' After a search it ( مِنْ ( الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ ) ) was found with Khozaima bin Thabit and was incorporated. *Tirmizi* records that there was disagreement among three copyists about the word, 'taboot' as to whether it should be written as 'taboot' or 'tabooh'. Othman decided to have it written as 'taboot.'<sup>21</sup> It is also part of this lore that during the copying of the Qur'anic text, Khozaima bin Thabit Ansari raised the objection that the copyists had left out two verses. When he pointed them out as — ' لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ ' [9:128], they were accepted for copying. But the problem as to where to place them still remained. Khozaima suggested that the surah should end with the verses. Thus, the verses became the concluding part of surah Bara'ah.<sup>22</sup> These traditions have not only weakened the faith of the ordinary people, but many great scholars and experts of traditions also could not save themselves from misgivings and hesitancy. The logical corollary of taking the traditions regarding the versions of the Qur'anic text by Abu Bakr and Othman that have crept into *Bukhari*, *Muslim* and *Tirmizi* and other books of authentic traditions as true would be the loss of faith in the Qur'an's status as a definitive text. A great scholar of tradition like Ibn Hajr who had tried to correlate (*tatbeeq*) and elucidate (*ta'wil*) the varying traditions that claim that even though the entire Qur'an had been written down during the Prophet's lifetime, it was not put together in one volume, nor was there any chapter-wise division ' إلا أنه لم يكن مجموعا في موضع واحد ولا مرتب السور'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, even in the case of the Othmanic version, the editors seemed to have been more casual than cautious. It is said that when the text was ready, Othman looked over it and remarked, 'You have done a good job, but there

are some inadequacies of 'Arabianness' in it which the Arabs can rectify on their own: 'أرى فيه شيئاً من اللحن مستقيمة العرب بألسنتها'.<sup>24</sup>

To substantiate the claim that it emanated from Allah the Qur'an had proffered this argument that had it not been from Allah people would have found contradictions and inconsistencies in it. These traditions related to the organization and compilation of the Qur'an have almost succeeded in creating such a situation. Not only that the seminal status of the Prophet's Companions 'وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ' was compromised, but also they (these traditions) project such a low image of the nice souls that was similar to what the Qur'an described as – 'إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ لَيِّنِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ' [2:176]. As a matter of fact, a minimal awareness of historical criticism and the critical tool of 'Antecedents' (*ilm al-rijal*) devised by the scholars of traditions themselves would have been enough to refute these traditions. Then, apart from the debate about the process of accessing traditions, these accounts have enough internal evidence to prove that they were fabricated and fanciful. It is difficult to understand that despite this how the compilers of the six authentic books of traditions (*sehah sitta*) incorporated them in their volumes, an act which was in direct opposition to the promise of 'وَأَنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ' made in the Qur'an. Some people suggest that such traditions may have been interpolated in the later stages. Whatever the case may be, by accommodating them in their margins through attributing them to reliable and unreliable sources, the tafseer literature has ensured that they stay in circulation forever. Our reliable books contain such accounts which, not to speak of traditions, cannot even qualify to be called ordinary reportage or history. For instance, it is recorded in *Sahih Muslim* that it was revealed in the Qur'an that ten sips of milk are enough to establish the relationship between the foster mother and the foster child, then it was rejected, and in its place the verse alluding to 'five sips' 'خمس رضعات معلومات يحرم من' was revealed, which is read even today. However much we tried, we could not locate this verse in the Qur'an. Apart from *Muslim*, the tradition has been recorded by *Nasei* too.<sup>25</sup>

The attitude adopted by our commentators towards history and tradition has largely been responsible for rendering the absolute nature of the Qur'an suspect. Tabari holds a key position in tafseer literature and is justifiably regarded as the greatest pioneer of this art. His excessive dependence on history in determining the meaning of the text often becomes reductive, either delimiting the meaning or rendering it stagnant or directionless. In analyzing and interpreting the Qur'anic verses he takes recourse to such an excessively wide gamut of historical accounts and traditions that in spite of subjecting these traditions to the strictest scrutiny and their summary rejection in the end, the impact left by them cannot be totally obliterated. In the context of the compilation of the Qur'an, if the fabricated tales regarding the

Siddiqi version or the Othmanic version have become a part of our consciousness, it is due to the fact that despite the contradiction among the traditions and an awareness of their disastrous consequences, the reader, wittingly or unwittingly, becomes a captive of that mythical world and then he cannot grasp even the most transparent and obvious meaning of the Qur'anic text, and he loses the ability to analyze events in the light of the internal evidence contained in the Qur'an. If the unreliable accounts regarding the Siddiqi version and the Othmanic version are still being quoted in modern commentaries on the Qur'an, through the Six Authentic Books of Tradition (*Sehah Sitta*), the reason for it goes back to the climate of myth-making through fanciful and fabricated accounts taken recourse to in an earlier age. Our interpreters and commentators have not been able to come out of it yet. Otherwise, the internal evidence contained in the Qur'an is enough to dismiss these fabricated accounts out of hand.

The Qur'an asserts in clear terms – لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَتْرِكُ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ – [41:42]. It is not an ordinary book but the most powerful book (*kitab al-azeez*). Nothing wrong can enter it either from the front or from behind. This is because it is revealed by Allah, the Judge (*hakeem*) and the Most Praised (*hameed*). Its protection is guaranteed by Him in unambiguous words – 'وَأَنَا لَهُ لَخَافِطُونَ'. He reassures His Prophet thus: 'وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ صِدْقًا وَعَدْلًا لَا مُبَدَّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ' [6:115], i.e., 'This Text of your Lord is so completely just and true that no one can effect any change in it. The Prophet himself took utmost precaution to preserve it both through written and verbal means. As the Qur'an states: بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ [85/21-22]; at another place the written Qur'an has been alluded to as 'وَكِتَابٍ مَسْطُورٍ فِي رَقٍّ مَنْشُورٍ' [57: 3]. Besides this, scholars had preserved it in their memory: 'بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ' [29:49]. It cannot be imagined that a text about which all kinds of precautions – verbal and written – were taken, should face a crisis because a man who memorized it died in the battle of Yamama. This is beside the fact that, historically, apart from Salim, the Maula of Abu Huzaifa, one finds the name of no other known scholars of the Qur'an (*qurra*) in the list of martyrs who died in the battle of Yamama. For the Prophet, preservation of Revelation was one of the most important and delicate issue. He could not have put up with any kind of laxity and lack of rigor in this task. This is also because the Qur'an termed the earlier divine texts as distorted, and the Qur'an itself contained references to the distortion in language and meaning with reference to the Israelites: 'يَحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ ' and 'يَكْتُمُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ'. And it is a historical truth that the Prophet and his Companions were very careful about protecting the Qur'an from such intrusions. Allah Himself appreciates the way the Prophet safeguarded the Qur'an as ' فِي صُحُفٍ مُكَرَّمَةٍ مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُنْظَرَةٍ بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ كَرَامٍ بَرَرَةٍ' [52:3], in the Qur'an as follows:



[80:13]. This Text was being written down by those who were men of piety, and were worthy of respect and honor. In other words, those who had the honor to memorize and copy it were not ordinary people who would be lax or who would exercise lack of caution while copying down the word of Allah. Rather, Allah Himself vouches for their honesty and integrity. Despite the presence of such crystal clear verses, if our commentators take these copyists of the Revelation to be angels who, according to them, copied it sitting in some lofty abode, the basic reason for such interpretations is that these interpreters are not ready to come out of the mythical world created by traditions, and read the text of the Qur'an as an independent corpus of knowledge. Right from Tabari down to the modern commentators such as Abul Ala Maududi, all take the copyists of the Qur'anic Text to be angels, and in their translations add 'angels' in parenthesis, that shifts the whole scenario from the Prophet's time to a world of which we have no idea, and we feel constrained to approach the commentators for any details that we want to know about that world. A similar scenario obtains in the case of ' لوح محفوظ ' as well which we have dealt with in the earlier chapters. It is amazing how this text within two covers ' رَقِ مَنشُورٌ ' has been transported into another world through the imaginative flights of our commentators, a world where the Qur'an was indeed being written down, but we cannot have any access to it.

Even a man of ordinary intelligence could have asked the question that if the Qur'anic Text did not exist in the Prophet's time, then how was the verse – ' رَسُوْلٌ مِّنَ اللّٰهِ ' – [98:2] read and understood by the people? If the Prophet did not have the sacred Text with him, then how did he read out from it? And a text for which it was said that there are innumerable laws written in it. However, those who considered the Prophet illiterate, who insisted that he had nothing to do with reading and writing,<sup>26</sup> that 'ummi' (as he was called) meant illiterate, for them it is not difficult to believe in such fanciful accounts, despite clear indications to the contrary. For them, it is enough that these accounts are found in reliable books of traditions and the exegetes have made them a subject of their debate. Those who study the Qur'an with open eyes soon realize not only the true nature of the promise made in the verse – ' وَإِنَّا لَهُ – لَحَافِظُونَ ' . It also becomes a part of their belief that besides ensuring the protection of the Qur'anic Text through both written and oral means, the process of compiling and organizing the text was also divinely undertaken. As Allah says in the Qur'an: ' إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا ' [75:17]. Like the older divine texts, the job of safeguarding the Qur'an was not left to scholars and community leaders. In the Qur'an there are clear suggestions that despite their best efforts, the scholars and leaders of the Israelites did not succeed in protecting the Torah: ' وَالرَّبَّانِيُّوْنَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللّٰهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ ' [5:44]. That

is why Allah took upon Himself the responsibility of protecting the last Revelation. He gave it to the Prophet of pen (عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ) and revealed it to a society that had a tradition of reading and writing. Save the Revelation that is vitally important for us, the Qur'an exhorts the believers to write down even the mundane transactions of everyday life. There is enough internal evidence in the Qur'an that refers to the society at Medina as one that had a culture of books and pen and that mentions the Qur'an as a definitive book in that society. It is surprising that those who take the book alluded to in the entire verse – 'فَلَا أُفْسِمُ بِمَوَاقِعِ النُّجُومِ وَإِنَّهُ لَقَسَمٌ لَوْ تَغْلَمُونَ عَظِيمٌ إِنَّهُ لَفُرْقَانٌ كَرِيمٌ فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا – ' [56:75-80] الْمُظْهَرُونَ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ' should be the book, which is protected in the distant skies, should think that the Qur'anic commandment of – 'لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُظْهَرُونَ' – should be valid for the people on the earth. If this book is protected in another world, how does the question of laying hands on it here arise, for which the condition of purity was laid down? But as the exegetes are accustomed to transport all such verses to another world, even this internal evidence contained in the Qur'an cannot release them from the stranglehold of fabricated accounts. There is such a strong hold of the earlier exegetes, particularly Tabari, on the Islamic interpretive literature that apparently all those comments written with the objective of creating an alternative perspective to Tabari, eventually turned out to be only an extension of the same intellectual flights taken recourse to by Tabari. We have become so accustomed to depend on the interpretive literature that we ignore the internal evidence contained in the Qur'an and cannot muster up enough courage to dismiss the role of human endeavors in compiling and organizing a definitive and divinely executed text like the Qur'an. Truly speaking, the books of interpretive literature and traditions have weakened the faith of some of us to a considerable extent.

We have already alluded to the view expressed by Hafiz Ibn Hajr Al-Asqalani that the Qur'an had not been compiled during the Prophet's lifetime, that the verses were scattered here and there, that the chapters (surah) were not organized etc.; all these, according to him, were done later by the Prophet's Companions according to their best judgment. Of course, he is not alone in expressing this view about the Qur'anic Text. A large number of renowned scholars of traditions and exegetes have shown themselves to be victims of such misconceptions about the final Divine Text. It is a commonly held belief that the organization of the surahs was not divinely executed, but was done by the Prophet's companions according to their best understanding of them (the verses) in the overall scheme of the Qur'an. There is no dearth of such traditions also that extend this idea even to the arrangement of verses within a surah. For instance, the following objection raised by Ibn Abbas found place in many reliable traditions: he had asked Othman why surah 'Al-Enfa'al' and 'Bara'ah' were not

separated by 'Basmalah', and why instead they were placed along side 'the seven big surahs'; Othman's reported reply was – as there was similarity in the theme of 'Al-Enfa'al.' surah Bara'ah was revealed last of all, and the Prophet died before making any statement about it. That is why I thought Bara'ah is just a part of 'Enfa'al' and did not have 'Basmalah' written between them.'<sup>27</sup> A similar story is told about caliph Omer who is credited to have placed the last two verses of surah Taubah at the place where they are found today.<sup>28</sup> As Bara'ah is the only chapter that starts without a bismilla, which is also taken as a separator, the two surahs, if taken together - because of the absence of a separator basmala- rank among the seven long surahs of the Qur'an. The idea that Qur'an has seven long surahs occurred important to those who attach special significance to number seven. However, there is no such scheme or implication in the text. In this surah the basmala is missing in the beginning perhaps because this surah has bismilla in the text inside. It is said that when Khuzaima bin Sabit Ansari presented the verse – 'لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ' [9:128] and Othman stood witness to it, the problem arose as to where to place it. Placing it at the end of surah Bara'ah was also said to be the result of the judgment of the Prophet's Companions.<sup>29</sup> Such traditions placed Othman on a much higher pedestal, from the simple collector of the Qur'anic Text he rises to the level of an editor or adjudicator. Because of the presence of such unreliable accounts in the genuine books of traditions this Divine Text came to be regarded as an Othmanic text, and the status of Othman as the compiler of the Qur'an became a part of the belief and knowledge of the majority of Muslims.

When any credence is given to the fact that the human intelligence had any role to play in the organization and compilation of the Divine Text, then naturally a question arises as to why the Divine Text should not be found out in its pristine form, so that the dilution and distortion that may have occurred to it through human interpretation is discounted and access is gained to the authentic Divine Word. In reliable books of the Qur'anic knowledge, evidence of efforts to pin down the exact timing of the revelation of each surah can be found. What should be the proper arrangement for them according to the chronology of revelation? Reservations were also expressed about the mixing of verses revealed at Mecca and Medina in the same surah, and it was suggested that unless the verses are arranged chronologically (rather than thematically), it would lead to grave complexities in the understanding of the Revelation. Scholars of traditions and exegetes have made their own listing of the surahs according to their time and place of revelation for a new organization of the Qur'an. There were serious disagreements among them about the exact chronology and placement of the surahs. The list prepared by Ibn Nadeem and Itqan created a

situation whereby people were ready with their own manuscripts of the Qur'anic Text, which they arranged on the basis of various traditions. As each group had a set of traditions to offer in support of its view, it was not possible to either accept or reject any version solely on the basis of such traditions. Sometimes, differing and conflicting versions of the same tradition were attributed to the same transmitter. The belief that the Qur'an was the complete, final and unadulterated version of the Word of God seems to die a natural death under the weight of such traditions.

It is claimed that the current version of the Qur'an is different from the version available at the time of the Prophet and that is certainly true about the arrangement of the text, if not the text itself. Even those who resisted this propaganda ultimately accepted the notion that the Prophet organized some surahs and the rest of the surahs were arranged by his Companions. Imam Malik, Qazi Abu Bakr and Ibn Farsi were said to be of this view.<sup>30</sup> Different versions were attributed respectively to Ali, Abdullah bin Masu'd, Ubai bin Ka'b, Abdullah bin Abbas and Muhammad bin Noman bin Basheer.<sup>31</sup> It had been said repeatedly about Ali and Abdullah bin Masu'd that even after the Othmanic version was completed, these gentlemen held on to their own versions and instructed their disciples to stick to their versions of the Qur'an. Tabari made a special mention of the fact that in the version prepared by Ibn Masu'd, surah Yunus figured at number 10. Ibn Nadeem's *Al-Fahrist* where one cannot find the listing of Ali's version of the Qur'anic Text, draws attention to the fact that among the different versions prepared by Ibn Masu'd there were no two versions that were perfectly identical<sup>32</sup> in their principle of organization. This sort of irresponsible statements about the Divine Word engendered doubts in the mind of even knowledgeable people about the definitiveness of the Qur'anic Text. As our attitude towards history was more reverential than critical, we accepted accounts and traditions as essential tools in our understanding of an absolute entity like the Revelation. Once these anti-Qur'anic views sneaked into reliable books of traditions and exegesis, later generations found it difficult to get rid of them. They had just one option open to them for proving the weakness of such traditions, and that was to search out the comparatively unreliable transmitters. But in an environment where hundreds of hypocrites (*munafiq*) in the guise of scholars of traditions were propagating false information day and night, it was not difficult for some to circumvent such a critical scrutiny (of identifying false transmitters). That is why this process of scrutiny and evaluation, despite being objective and scientific to a great degree, could not establish high standard of judging the intrinsic merit of tradition (*dirayat*). The veracity of this can be established if we undertake a comparative study of the nine popularly known

books of Hadith. Even if Imam Muslim has been successful in keeping the fabricated traditions regarding the compilation of the Qur'an at arm's length, they have made their way into *Bukhari*, *Tirmizi*, and other books through different means.

For any piece of writing, coherence between the preceding and succeeding lines within a paragraph and the organization of different parts have a seminal role to play. When this belief gets credence that the Qur'an that we have today is different from the version of the Prophet that some of his Great Companions had compiled according to the information available to them, it naturally paved the way for the potential problem encountered by Jurists and exegetes arising out of the arrangement of lines in different orders. The source of the debates relating to the abrogator and the abrogated, and the occasion of revelation of verses is basically inherent in this notion. And as the understanding of a definitive entity like the Qur'an through the means of an indecisive tool like history could have created immense possibilities of needless debates, the Qur'anic sciences and the books of exegesis became a fertile ground for unnecessary, non-Qur'anic and mythological debates. This belief gained currency that if we could determine the correct order of verses and that of surahs in the Qur'anic Text, and all the historical controversies regarding it can be converged on one point, then the Qur'an would be able to guide us in the way it had guided the Prophet's Companions in an earlier age. In other words, through these traditions, the notion of a hidden Qur'an made its place in our belief system. Among the Shiites, the notion of the so-called Ali's version passed down travelled from generation to generation until it disappeared with the hidden imam (*imam-e ghaib*). And their imams and thinkers exhorted them to make a do with the Othmanic version. The *ahl-e sunnah wal-Jama'h*, the mainstream Muslims, do not believe in any lost text on principle. Nevertheless the Sunni thought-structure that is formed through the traditions in the *Sehah Sitta*, the books of exegesis and the Qur'anic sciences, is somehow undercut by this supposed defect of the Othmanic version. Here, the difference between the original version and the Othmanic version may not be as glaring as in the case of the Shiites. However, this has to be accepted that those who consider the traditions reported by Shahab Zahri found in *Bukhari* and *Tirmizi* as genuine, should consider the current Qur'anic Text only as the 'Siddiqi version' or the 'Othmanic version' the defects of which have been drawn attention to at places in the same traditions.

We would expect to leave out the common people who treat the *Sehah Sitta* as oracles, and whose attitude towards the interpretation of the ancients is one of reverence, even servility. However, if a leader of Islam like Ibn Taimiyah appears to be a victim of such misconceptions, one realizes the gravity of the situation. In one of his

edicts, he clearly mentioned that in the compilation of the surahs in the Qur'an, gesticulation rather than *nass* (text from which the law is derived) had a role to play. He also claimed that the majority of the scholars of Hanbali, Shafei' and Maliki schools had the same view. As regards the current Othmanic version, one had to follow this, as the Prophet's Companions agreed on this, and following the tradition laid down by the holy companions is obligatory (*wajib*). Nevertheless, according to Ibn Taimiyah, for the purposes of analysis, interpretation or getting access to meaning and significance of the verses, it is not essential for anyone to stick to the arrangement in the current version.<sup>33</sup> Taking this view as correct would amount to putting the seal of approval on the misdirected notion of a hidden version of the Qur'an. The logical and immediate step after this should be to search out the version with the original arrangement of the surahs. For the sake of elucidation and interpretation, if it is allowed to change the order of sentences and the surahs in the current version, and it paves the way for a newer understanding of the Qur'an, then a search for the original arrangement would certainly deserve a priority to help us in accessing the true meaning of the Qur'an. An understanding of the text based on the original order of verses and chapters would certainly be more authentic than the one based on human speculations. But the problem is that, according to Muhammad Ajmal, 'I instructed Akrama to arrange it according to the chronological order of revelation. At this, Akrama replied – if all human beings and Jinns come together and ask me to do this, even then it would be beyond my ability to do so.'<sup>34</sup>

These notions have kept the thinkers and the exegetes busy searching for the supposed original Qur'an. The Orientalists had taken upon themselves the responsibility of compiling a new Qur'an different samples of which have been presented in the name of historical criticism by them from time to time. The Muslim thinkers and exegetes have done the same job in the name of organizing the surahs of the Qur'anic Text in accordance with the chronology and the site of revelation. To provide a possible historical and social context and to formulate rules and regulations according to them is, in fact, an effort at organizing the text according to revelation. It would not be possible for the exegetes to unravel the complex configurations of meaning without first resolving this issue.

Once the Revelation was accepted as the 'Othmanic Codex' or the 'Othmanic version', it left the door open for the conjecture that the form in which it has come to us also incorporates the editorial and organizational intervention of the later generations. It was claimed that as the Othmanic version was devoid of points and diacritical marks, countless errors had crept into the way it was read.<sup>35</sup> Thus, to start with, about two thousand errors were alleged to have been removed at the instruction

of Zayd (d. 67 hijra).<sup>36</sup> The next person to try his hand on the already corrected Qur'anic Text was Hajjaj bin Yusuf who is supposed to have corrected at least eleven very obvious errors.<sup>37</sup> It was also claimed that at the instance of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, Nazr bin Amir embellished the text with points and other diacritical marks.<sup>38</sup> According to these traditions, the story of human interpolation in the Revelation does not stop here. To take the task to its logical conclusion, the character of Abu Aswad Al Dauli was brought to the fore. Beside him, the names of Yahya bin Ya'mar (d.39 hijra), Nasr bin Asim Al Laisi (d. 89 hijra) also cropped up in connection with the compilation and elucidation of the text.<sup>39</sup> Despite the presence of *Hadith* alluding to the Qur'an as a text equipped with diacritical marks in the books of traditions, the idea that the Qur'an was devoid of points and diacritical marks was accepted and it was asserted that Abul Aswad was led to undertake the task because of the erroneous reading of the Qur'an by people. For instance, a person was heard to read the verse – 'أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ' – 'وَرَسُولُهُ'<sup>40</sup> that totally distorted the intended meaning of the verse, as it came to mean that God had nothing to do with the polytheists or with the Prophet. In other words, there was enough scope for such semantic distortions in the Othmanic version, and Abu Aswad was brought on the scene to rectify these. The question still remains that human intellect and wisdom, even if it reaches its uttermost limit, can never attain the status of a sacred text. Thus the supposed intervention by human compilers and linguists left this open to conjecture as to how fallible these interventions were. Then if something as hallowed as the Revelation is mediated to the people through an evil personality and an oppressor like Hajjaj, then its authenticity becomes a big question mark by itself, as history presents us the image of Hajjaj as an extremely unreliable person. Some people even had no qualms in declaring him a Kafir.<sup>41</sup> One consequence of bringing down the grandeur of the Divine Word to the level of a version by Hajjaj was that even reliable people were invaded by doubts and misgivings about the authenticity of the Qur'an. Some people reached the conclusion that the Qur'an as it was revealed to the Prophet had undergone the process of annulment and distortion in his own lifetime. And in the later years, if it had emerged as a definitive text, then its only witness was Abdullah bin Masu'd.<sup>42</sup> In some traditions, this position was given to Zayd bin Thabit.<sup>43</sup> Even this was said that he was with the Prophet when it was taking its final shape under the supervision of Gabriel. The participation of Zayd bin Thabit, to some extent, gives credibility to the Othmanic version, but the reference to Abdullah bin Masu'd robs it of any credibility as his disagreements regarding the Othmanic version have been recorded in details in the books of history and traditions. Then, is the definitive text of the Qur'an of the later stage, different editions of which are

attributed to different companions of the Prophet in the books of history, still beyond our reach? Our interpretive literature gives such an impression about the Revelation.

The so-called 'Othmanic Text' whose supposed defects have been dealt with so far in considerable details has, according to the learned exegetes, remained a controversial version, both historically and ideologically. A famous but fabricated tradition has played an important role in rendering this version suspect in the eyes of the people. Apart from *Bukhari*, *Muslim* and other books of traditions, it has found place even in *Muwatta* Imam Malik. According to this tradition, the Prophet said: 'انزل القرآن على سبعة أحرف فافرؤا ما 'تيسر منه' A group of religious scholars say that in the Siddiqi version, the Revelation was preserved in all its grandeur, i.e., it was preserved in seven textual parallels (*saba' ahraf*).<sup>44</sup> However, in the period of Othman, because of serious disagreement among people, the Prophet's companions were compelled to confine the Qur'an to only one linguistic mode (*harf*).<sup>45</sup> The second group of scholars opines that as the Othmanic version was devoid of points and diacritical marks, it was possible to read or interpret it in all the seven potential ways, with the seven potential implications intact.<sup>46</sup> If so, has the consensus of the Prophet's Companions in the Othmanic period or in the later days the intervention of linguists, resulted in the loss of six levels of the Qur'an? Well, the logical implication of giving credence to the tradition relating to the preservation of the seven parallels cannot be but this only. Some scholars strike a middle path. They say that the remaining six parallels of the Qur'an have not been lost, but are there inherent in the current text, but we cannot decipher them with any degree of certainty.<sup>47</sup> We feel that these three conjectures, even if they accept the fact of the remaining six levels being lost or being retrievable, point to the loss of a significant segment of the Qur'an. To accept this view would mean our loss of faith in the inviolability and absolute purity of the Qur'an.

Ibn Jarir Tabari has dealt with the concept of 'سبعة أحرف' in considerable detail. He reached the conclusion that the six other parallels of the Qur'an were interchangeable with or incorporated in the existing text. When the people accepted one linguistic manifestation consensually, the remaining six parallels became redundant.<sup>48</sup> According to him, just as in the case of a minor penance, one can choose among a number of actions like freeing a slave, feeding ten destitute or making a gift of clothes to them, in the same way, to stay in the way of faith it is enough if one chooses one among the seven parallels. But Tabari's view did not stop the floodgates of interpretations regarding the seven *ahraf*. Almost every interpreter of the Qur'an and exegete considered it his duty to jump into the fray. After fourteen centuries, our exegetes even today are unable to explain what the *seven ahraf* really are. The disagreement among the scholars on this issue recorded in the books of exegesis would make it clear that not only the debate has



remained inconclusive, but it has left a trail of grave doubts about the 'reductive' nature of the current Qur'anic Text, and the preservation of both the Word and the meaning in it.

We have already discussed in the earlier chapters, with reference to the mystic interpreters of the Torah, how the Jewish scholars had divided the Revelation on the Mount Sinai into light and voice. It was said that the light stood for the written Torah whereas voice stood for the oral Torah. It was also asserted that every letter revealed or every voice heard on Mount Sinai had 70 dimensions or levels, on the basis of which there could be 70 interpretations of the Revelation.<sup>49</sup> The simultaneous and multiple interpretation of the Revelation was an activity through which one could introduce variations or new elements in it easily. The Jewish scholars who had created a strong barrier of interpretive literature around Torah were quite adept in the process of the art of interpolation; indicated in 'يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ'. We feel that those who propagated the idea of the revelation of the Qur'an on seven linguistic planes or those among us who tried to give this notion respectability by presenting this statement as that of the Prophet, may not have been totally unaware of similar interpretations in the cases of the earlier divine texts. If one takes a look at the differing and contradictory views presented in the exegetical literature of Islam that has become a part of our cultural inheritance, one soon realizes that these traditions are foregrounded on the dilution and distortion of the Revelation. To accept them would amount to reducing a hallowed text such as the Qur'an to the level of a plaything for kids.

According to Zohar's Kabbalistic interpretation, every letter in the revelation on Moses could be divided into 70 voices. In our case also, there is a 'continuous' tradition attributed to Ibn Masu'd, where it is said that the earlier texts or scrolls were revealed through a 'single door'; whereas the Qur'an was revealed through seven doors and on seven linguistic planes, and they are: *zaajir* (predictions), *aamir* (rulings) *halal* (permissible), *haram* (forbidden), *muhkam* (inherently clear, and not susceptible to abrogation), *mutashabih* (equivocal and ambiguous; susceptible to different interpretations because of lack of precedent in usage) and *imsaal* (parables).<sup>50</sup> Even though this tradition did not gain the approval of the scholars of traditions, still such denigrating efforts point to the fact as to how the fanciful accounts of the seven interchangeable *ahraf*, i.e., seven sets of interchangeable Revelations were fabricated in an effort to distort and change a sanctified book like the Qur'an. It was said that in the Qur'anic revelations, the status of the words is not absolute and final. As it was revealed in seven linguistic parallels, one word can very well be replaced by one of its synonyms that would make no difference. For example, a group of ulama said that any word out of a list that contains 'أقبل', 'هلم', and 'تعال' could be used interchangeably. It

makes no difference if one uses 'أسرع' in place of 'عجل', and that if anyone uses 'أمهل' in place of 'انظر' or 'أخر' in the Qur'an, it would mean the same.<sup>51</sup> However, Tabari reminds us of the only caveat that relates to the Prophet's instruction to Omer. The Prophet is reported to have said: 'O Omer, you can use any sort of word in the Qur'an on the condition that you do not change the word *rahmah* (blessings) with *azaab* (wrath) and *azaab* with *rahmah*.<sup>52</sup> The concept of 'seven parallels' has reduced the Qur'an from the status of the Divine Word to a text of confused meanings. Some ulama even expressed the view that in the reading of a verse, if there is change in the meaning of the text because of change in the diacritical marks, it did not really matter, because the reading would still be within the purview of the seven *ahraf*. For example, it was said that if the verse – 'فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ' [2:37] is read as – 'فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ' – 'كلمات', both the readings would be considered as valid.<sup>53</sup> As there was a great probability to read *ya'lamoona* as *ta'lamoona* in the versions without points and diacritical marks, this kind of readings were also sought to be validated with the argument of the 'seven multiples'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in the verse – 'وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ' – 'رَاعُونَ' [23:8], it was considered permissible to read the word *لأماناتهم* in the singular as *لأمانتهم*.<sup>55</sup> If one wanted to read the Qur'an in the lingo of his tribe by interchanging synonyms, for example, 'كالصفوف المنفوش' for 'كالعهن المنفوش' [106], this was also sought to be approved through taking recourse to the seven *ahraf*.<sup>56</sup> At times, even the copyist's errors and the misreading born out of the absence of diacritical marks were also considered permissible. For example, it was considered valid to read 'طَلِحَ مَنْضُودٍ' [56:29] as 'طلع منضود'.<sup>57</sup> It was said with reference to Imam Malik that he continued to read 'فامضوا إلى ذكر الله' in place of 'فأسعوا' in the verse 9 of the surah Jum'a.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, such readings where changing the order of sentences do not effect any significant change in the meaning were also considered permissible. For example, in the verse – 'يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ' [9:111], if one changes the order of *يقاتلون* and *يقتلون*, then, according to the interpretation of seven levels, it does not make any difference.<sup>59</sup> About a less-known reading, it was claimed with reference to Abu Bakr that he used to read the verse – 'وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْحَقِّ بِالْمَوْتِ' [50:19] as – 'وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ'.<sup>60</sup> As to the question of the use of preposition, such Qur'anic readings, as the addition of 'من' before the phrase 'تَحْتَهَا الْأَنْهَارُ' in the verse – 'جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ' [9:100] were accepted quite liberally as within the ambit of the seven levels of interpretation, and such multiple readings of the Qur'an were claimed to be validated by 'uninterrupted traditions' (متواترة), and in accordance with the Othmanic text.<sup>61</sup>

Our exegetical books often vouch for the frequent occurrence (*tawatur*) and reliability of the fabricated tradition regarding the supposed seven textual parallels.<sup>62</sup> It

has opened the floodgates of controversy regarding not only the Qur'anic interpretation but the text as well. Instead of one Qur'an we had numerous texts produced on the basis of the seven *ahraf*. It happened because, in principle, we accepted the fact that in the Qur'anic verses it is not only permissible to create newer versions through the use of synonyms, making changes in the diacritical marks and sonic pattern, all this would be considered as divinely executed according to the seven levels of interpretation. Thus, the possibility opened up for one verse to have not only seven versions but also many more, in geometric progression. This is how the concept of the Qur'an as a definitive and inviolable text that was firmly planted in the minds of Muslims of the first century hijra, particularly in the period of the Prophet's Companions, was gradually weakened. This explains the change of our attitude towards the Qur'an as a Book that was invested with honor and heavenly grandeur, after the passing away of the first generation of the Prophet's followers. From Tabari, down to the contemporary exegetes, and from Bukhari to the current scholars of tradition, there would be only a miniscule section that regards the Qur'anic text, letter by letter, from Allah. Those who believe in the concept of seven levels of meaning and the other detailed interpretive accounts in support of the fabricated traditions found in the *Sehah Sitta*, however much capable they are to undertake a harmonization (*tatbeeq*) of these traditions they would find it difficult to derive the concept of an undistorted Qur'an from them.

We have already recorded Tabari's statement that according to the consensus arrived at by the Prophet's Companions the remaining six parallel texts (*ahraf*) have been done away with. According to this view, out of the seven parallel texts, Muslims now inherit just one.<sup>63</sup> Tabari reaches the conclusion that the remaining six parallels were rejected in the later years, and that the seven possible readings of the Qur'an were allowed only in the initial years, even though the Qur'an was revealed in the Quraish dialect.<sup>64</sup> Even if one accepts this hypothesis, it does not lead us to the concept of the Revelation where both the words and the meanings have equal importance. Then, we have to accept the fact that in the later years the Qur'an came to its final shape through a process of evolution. To think of the Revelation in these terms is nothing short of blasphemous. Then, historically, there is a problem with this view and it is this: there is no evidence of any clear instruction regarding the rectification or distortion in that part of the Qur'anic Text that was with the émigrés (*muhajireen*) from Ethiopia in the initial years or the parts that were scattered among other tribes through various means. Abul Khair Al-Jazri has tried to adopt a comparatively moderate path. He says that the Othmanic version incorporates all the seven parallels and it is not permissible for Muslims to bypass any of the *harf* out of the seven.<sup>65</sup>

Apparently, this view seems to strive for a synthesis but, in actual practice, to incorporate all the different seven parallels in one verse, and to separate them by means of reading and interpretation seems an impossible task. Only those speak in these terms who, instead of identifying the real nature of a problem and suggesting ways to solve it, are more interested in finding an escape route. Abul Hasan Ash'ari who is known in our history of thought as someone who wanted to determine the majority view of our debates on the Qur'an and who is known for his predilection to strike a middle course on knotty issues, he too expressed the view that the current version of the Qur'an incorporates all seven textual parallels. At the same time, he admitted the fact that one cannot identify all the seven parallels with any measure of certainty.<sup>66</sup> Ashari's statement also leads one to conceive of a text, a major part of which is still outside the human ken because of its unknowability. Ibn Hazm, known for challenging conventional views and striking his own path, made the sweeping statement that if Othman had rejected the six textual parallels he would have been ejected from Islam forthwith, but even his critical ken failed to grasp the far-reaching implications of the seven *ahraf*. He remained steadfast to his view of the seven parallels being intact in the current text<sup>67</sup> but could not provide a single example of any verse to prove his point. A similar stance was adopted by Abul Waleed Al-Baji, the interpreter of *Muwatta* who believes in the presence of the seven textual parallels in the light of the Divine promise of protection and preservation of the Book (وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ), but instead of pointing them out in the current text, he takes it to denote different readings of the text.<sup>68</sup> Among the votaries of the seven *ahraf*, the names of Imam Ghazali<sup>69</sup> and Mulla Ali Qari<sup>70</sup> are quite important. However, in the later centuries, when the concept of the seven readings became known, some people took the seven *ahraf* to mean seven different readings. They consider seven readings as the highest number, but they do not limit this number. According to Shah Waliullah, the number 7 cannot be used to indicate uppermost limit. That is why, he says, there is consensus among the imams on ten readings.<sup>71</sup> Anwer Shah Kashmiri who assumed importance because of the honor he received from Deoband as a scholar of traditions says that in the Qur'an the seven textual parallels or the seven shades of meaning are intact even today which, probably, Tabari was unaware of.<sup>72</sup> But he seemed unable to adduce any evidence in support of his statement. For the scholars of the Qur'an, this has remained a complex problem right from the days of Tabari up until modern times, as to how they should harmonize the tradition alluding to the seven supposed textual parallels to the current Qur'anic Text. On the one hand, the Qur'anic assertion – وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ – compels them to believe that the Qur'an has remained inviolable, that each and every letter of the Qur'an

comes from Allah and has remained unchanged; on the other hand, the tradition relating to the seven *ahraf* constantly whispers it into their ears that whatever they are reading in the current text, equipped with diacritical marks, is only one layer out of the seven. These seven *ahraf* not only imply seven versions but they contain limitless forms of the Revelation of which they are still unaware. One has yet to identify and assess the possibility of these limitless hidden texts that this tradition points to. As long as the current Qur'anic Text does not clearly contradict the concept of these limitless potential texts and reject this notion conclusively, the definitiveness and finality of the Qur'an would not be firmly imprinted in our mind, nor will our misgivings and worries about the Revelation, brought on by our ancient scholars and exegetes, be removed. And unless we restore our faith in the finality and invincibility of the Revelation our approach to the Revelation can only be merely academic and it will not ring any chord in our hearts.

#### PROBLEM OF THE ABROGATOR AND THE ABROGATED

After casting a shadow of doubt over the definitiveness of the Revelation and its sanctity, the last nail in its coffin was driven by those who said that the entire body of the current Qur'anic text is not worthy of practice. Some of its verses that provided guidance earlier have been rejected by Allah's latter commands. Attempts were made to read verse number 106 of surah Baqara – *مَا نَسَخَ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسَخْهَا تَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّمَّا أَوْ مِثْلِهَا* – as an abrogated verse, alienating it from its original context. When this idea was floated that some verses in the Qur'an abrogated some other verses, the exegetes showed such flights of imagination in their indefatigable search for the abrogator and the abrogated verses that at one time it seemed as though the entire Qur'anic Text would stand abrogated by other verses in it. Even those who tried to arrest this excess could not bring down the number of abrogated verses below five hundred.<sup>73</sup> As the ulama had formulated this principle about abrogation that it would stand valid only in the case of commands (*ahkaam*) and not in the case of verses relating to other matters of information and knowledge (*khabar*). As a justification of this principle that was formulated after the abrogation of some verses of the Qur'an, it was said that to accept the validity of this principle in the case of reports would indirectly make Allah (May Allah save us from such abomination!) open to the charge of falsehood.<sup>74</sup> That leaves the verses relating to instructions. The ulama said that such verses in the Qur'an also numbered five hundred.<sup>75</sup> Thus, for a moment, it seemed as though the foundation of our Qur'anic understanding was severely shaken by this process of abrogation. Even though this extreme view regarding abrogation of verses soon faded out, it is still regarded as a valid principle in our understanding of the Qur'an, and a majority of

Jurists and exegetes regard its knowledge as the key to the understanding of the Qur'an. Actually, the verse regarding abrogation occurred in the Qur'an in the context of the earlier communities where it could, at best, be taken to mean the abrogation of earlier laws (sharia) and that is all. The question still remains as to whether some verses of the Qur'an can abrogate some of its other. Can the Qur'anic verses be abrogated by the authority of traditions (Hadith) or, can the traditions be abrogated by the authority of the Qur'an, on principle? These are the debates given birth not by the Qur'an but by our exegetes. In the exegetical literature encompassing twelve centuries these debates about identifying the abrogated verses of the Qur'an raged on endlessly.

To start with, the very hypothesis that any verse in the Qur'an can stand abrogated or it can be unworthy of practice, or following any verse may be impermissible and can invite Allah's wrath is wrong. Even if the process of abrogation is accepted as a principle in the Qur'anic epistemology, the question will still remain as to how far it is valid to leave it to human hands to point out the abrogated verse in a divinely executed text. If human beings are allowed to exhibit their imaginative and intellectual flights in the matters of a definitive text like the Qur'an, it would soon lead to excesses and serious controversies as evident in our exegetical literature about identifying the abrogated verses. Its main cause is the audacity shown by our exegetes and interpreters in matters pertaining to the Qur'an. They declared hundreds of verses abrogated on the authority of a single verse. For example, about one hundred and fifty verses that exhort people about toleration, peaceful co-existence, truce, redemption etc. were declared abrogated on the authority of *ayah Qital*.<sup>76</sup> Human beings, in their quest for abrogated verses, not only showed such audacity that was not in keeping with the status of the Revelation but also gave birth to the doubt that the Qur'an as it is – word by word and letter by letter – cannot be made a guide to human life. If it is so, then the question arises as to what part of the Qur'an is still worthy of practice or a source of guidance, the answer to which is still awaited even after the fierce debates encompassing twelve centuries. Whatever has been done so far is encapsulated in the fact that Ibn Arabi has reduced the number of abrogated verses from 500 to 150.<sup>77</sup> Sayuti reduced this number still further, to 20,<sup>78</sup> and Shah Waliullah, the renowned scholar of the sub-continent rejected 15 out of them and brought the tally of abrogated verse to 5<sup>79</sup> only. Muhammad Abdahu and his supporters brought down the tally further to 3.<sup>80</sup> Of course, the impression still remained that the disagreement of the ulama regarding the abrogated verses does not negate the idea that there are some parts in the Qur'anic Text, as it exists now, that need not be practiced anymore; according to the ulama, these parts have first been abrogated by the Qur'an and then, according to some others, by the sunnah.

It is surprising how our exegetes could show such audacity towards the Revelation as to declare that many verses of the Book that has been made the guide for the human kind till the end of this world are no longer worthy of practice, and then in the quest of these supposedly abrogated verses, opened the door for unending debates. Fanciful accounts were brought to the fore in support of the view that some verses were abrogated, annulled or rescinded. These accounts whose internal contradictions bore sufficient proof that they were fabricated, were included in the books of exegesis without much reflection about their implications. For example, Qurtabi has recorded the following with reference to Shahab Zahri: A man came to the Prophet and said – يا رسول الله فمت الليل لأقرأ سورة من القرآن فلم اقدر – على شيء منها. Another person came and said the same. A third one also voiced his objection in the same way. The Prophet said – إنها مما نسخ الله البارحة –.

Neither of the persons raising the objections said which surah he did not remember, nor did the Prophet in his reply refer to the verse or surah that had supposedly been rescinded according to that fabricated tradition. Only Allah knows what surah these three persons referred to and what surah the Prophet referred to in his reply, and which surah was, in fact, rescinded. This is a riddle that the interpreters of this tradition have not unraveled.

Tabari, Qurtabi and Zamakhshari are not simply advocates of abrogation, but accord the knowledge of abrogated verses a key position in the understanding of the Qur'an.<sup>81</sup> According to the Shafeites, the verses of the Qur'an can be abrogated both by other verses from it as well as by the traditions having an unbroken chain of transmitters (*sunnah mutawaterah*).<sup>82</sup> Zamakhshari, who is a Mu'tazelite, supports the view of the Hanafi School. According to him, when 'continuous' and 'clear' traditions (*sunnah makshoofa mutawatera*) can equal the Qur'an in matters of obligatory knowledge, there can be no reason why it should not be considered qualified to abrogate Qur'anic instructions.<sup>83</sup> Allama Alusi whose commentaries, because of their later provenance, seem to incorporate our exegetical literature, goes a step further and says that the statement – نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلِهَا – confers on the *Hadith* the status of the Qur'an's abrogator. According to him, the expression – وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ – in fact, puts both the Qur'an and *Hadith* on the same pedestal, and that is why there is no harm if we accept *Hadith* as the abrogator of the Qur'an.<sup>84</sup>

In identifying the abrogated verses, the quest for the abrogating verses and traditions have introduced great complexity in the understanding of the Qur'an. The Prophet's traditions are certainly venerable, but conferring on the transmitters of traditions the status of Gabriel has, to a great extent, made the Revelation subservient to history. Once this notion got respectability, then in the knowledge of the Qur'an,

traditions were elevated from the status of an aid to comprehending the Revelation to the measure of testing its inherent merit. However, even according to them, the words of the Qur'an are from Allah whereas the status of traditions, despite its authenticity, is that of *rawayat bil ma'ni*, that is to say, no more than that of indirect speech. To give it precedence over the Revelation would mean that we are giving precedence to the reporters of traditions over Gabriel.

There is no doubt about the fact that if traditions had the authority of the abrogator, then there was so much material in smaller and bigger books of reports that it would have totally changed the complexion of the whole corpus of the Revelation. However, those people whose intellectual flights had reached to the extent of undertaking a quest for the search of abrogated verses in the Qur'an, and to look for the abrogator in that very text, did not find any difficulty in providing a long list of abrogator-verses. It reached such a stage when one part of the verse was said to be abrogating the other part. In the verse 105 of surah Al-Maeda – عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَن ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ – the latter part of the verse was said to be the abrogator of the earlier part, عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, it was said that in the verse – خذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ [7:199], the initial and the concluding parts were abrogated, while the middle part was not so.<sup>86</sup> At times, the study of the Qur'an from the perspectives of the abrogator and the abrogated gave rise to interesting but fallacious debates. For example, it was said about the fifth verse of surah Al-Tawba – فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ – that it functions as the abrogator to 114 other verses of the same surah, and within the verse itself, its concluding part – فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ – functions as the abrogator to the initial part.<sup>87</sup> This principle was brought to the fore that at times the same abrogator-verses could stand abrogated by the authority of some other verses. For example, لَكُمْ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ – was declared abrogated by فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَدِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ and then the verse – عَنْ يَدِهِ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ was brought to the fore as its abrogator.<sup>88</sup> The convention of reading the Qur'an from this angle led a situation where, out of the same set of instructions, some were declared abrogated and others as valid. For example, it was said that in the verse – وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا – [76:8] the word أسيرا meant prisoners who believed in multiple Gods. As the instruction regarding sympathetic treatment with them was abrogated by the verse on jihad (*ayah saif*), that is why these prisoners should not be considered deserving of the treatment enjoined by 'وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ'.<sup>89</sup> In some cases, the verses where the believers were exhorted to spend their assets in acts of charity were also considered to be in the category of abrogated verses, as it was thought after the instructions regarding the obligatory zakat there remained no further need for individual acts of charity: وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ [2:3].<sup>90</sup> At times, the search for the abrogated



verses also created complexities in the understanding of well-known juristic issues. For example, it was asserted about the verse – *إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ* – نَارًا وَسَيَصْلُونَ سَعِيرًا [4:10] now stands abrogated<sup>91</sup> by the verse 6 of the same surah: *وَمَنْ كَانَ غَنِيًّا فَلْيَسْتَغْفِرْ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ فَقِيرًا فَلْيَأْكُلْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ*. It went to the extent that those basic values that had been alluded to in the Qur'an from time to time to exhort and advice the followers of the earlier prophets were also declared abrogated. For example, in the covenants of the Israelites the words *قُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا* were declared abrogated by the authority of the ayah Saif (verses relating to jihad).<sup>92</sup> In sum, the debates about the abrogator and the abrogated verses brought on a cycle of conjectures and suppositions that every verse seemed to be abrogated and every command seemed to be a suspect. Looked from this perspective, according to the ulama who specialized in the art of abrogation, there was hardly any surah left in the Qur'an without having some verses that were abrogated or that functioned as abrogators. However, it was found that there were six surahs that contained only abrogator-verses, forty surahs that contained abrogated verses and thirty-one surahs that contained both the abrogators and the abrogated. As to the question of surahs that were devoid of either kind of verses, there were found to be only forty-three.<sup>93</sup> This was the study of those cautious advocates who had come to the fore to exercise some kind of restraint in the prevailing atmosphere of excesses regarding the art of abrogation. Otherwise, if one takes into account the mutual disagreement among different groups of advocates and their individual claims, it would leave a very small part of the Qur'an from the clutches of abrogation.

This was the concept of abrogation whereby one verse of the Qur'an stood abrogated by another verse, or one Divine instruction undercut or reduced the scope of another. Apart from this, there was such a part of abrogated verses about which there was a clear view that this part did not exist anymore in the Qur'an. However, there is some evidence, coming through various reliable and unreliable sources, pointing to the fact that they do exist in the Qur'an. For example, with reference to Ayisha, a report was transmitted that surah Ahzab comprised almost two hundred verses, but during the compilation of the Othmanic version of the Qur'an only the existing verses were available<sup>94</sup>. Some people were of the opinion that this surah also comprised the verse – *إذا زنى الشيخ والشيخة فارجموهما البتة نكالا من الله والله عزيز حكيم* – dealing with the command to stoning to death.<sup>95</sup> In their quest for the abrogated verses, when the interpreters of the Qur'an resorted to other sources, they could find a long list of abrogated verses. They also came across such verses as were, according to reports, taken away by Allah but, in fact, were preserved by the transmitters. The concept of the Qur'an which is supposed to be hidden, encouraged different reporters and transmitters to present a list of

abrogated verses according to their own whims. Someone was of the opinion that the verse dealing with the punishment of stoning to death was recited, but not the way Ubai bin Ka'ab has reported it to be. The text of this verse was as it goes – الشيخ والشيخة – *فارجموهما البتة بما قضيا من اللذة*.<sup>96</sup> The interpreters' quest for the abrogated verses beyond the Qur'an paved the way to deviation and corruption introduced in the Qur'an. It was said with reference to Ayisha's version that the words *وعلى الذين يصلون الصفوف الأول* occurred after the following verse of the Qur'an – *إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا* [33:56], which were either not included in the Othmanic version or taken away by Allah.<sup>97</sup> This notion of the verse being taken away by Allah or being lost to memory or being dissolved became so widespread that they found mention in authentic commentaries of the Qur'an – that some revelation was sent to the Prophet one morning that could not be preserved up until the next morning, and that the verse – *مَا نَسَخَ مِنْ آيَةٍ* – was revealed in this context.<sup>98</sup> With the notion of the Revelation being lost to memory becoming so common it led people to believe that it was incredible that one could remember the entire Qur'an by heart. Rather, according to Omer, one should say that one has committed that portion of the Qur'an to one's memory that had been revealed.<sup>99</sup> This kind of debates, reports and transmissions contained enough material for those who wanted to prove the Revelation to contain some inadequacy and engender doubts in the mind of the people against the veracity of the Qur'anic text, letter by letter. By incorporating these petty reports in the exegetical literature we have not only provided opportunities to the enemies of Islam to be unduly critical but also allowed the glory of the Qur'an to fade away from the mind of the believers. The height of this is that we often thought these interminable and complex debates to be a part of the Qur'anic sciences or ancillary knowledge.

The quest for an abrogated text outside the current Qur'anic Text took us to look for fabricated verses that had just one objective: to create doubts about the Revelation. In the reports related to this quest, aspersions were made on the characters of the Prophet's illustrious companions and fabricated verses of the Qur'an and counterfeit versions of the Qur'anic Text were produced. But our exegetes who gave a key position to the debates on different readings of the Qur'an, and the abrogator and the abrogated, in the understanding of the Qur'an, were so busy in filling the footnotes of their books of commentaries with such reports that they did not realise that through these fabricated verses and fanciful accounts and reports, they were really creating road blocks in the way of our understanding the Qur'an. Once these crept into the exegetical literature, it became difficult for those trained in the culture of following the Predecessors to get rid of them.

The task of identifying the abrogated verses transformed the Revelation from the Book of Guidance to the Book of benediction. The only objective of reading the verses that had been declared abrogated was that the believers derive some divine blessings from them. To bring down Revelation from the level of light to the level of sacred relics is tantamount to distortion by itself. Moreover, this notion about the Qur'an became common that some abrogated verses exist outside the Qur'an, which are known as 'abrogated for recitation' or منسوخ التلاوة, and their commands (*hukm*) are still valid. The supposed ayah Rajm has a wide reputation, although there is no dearth of such verses whose different versions are available through different reporters in the books of interpretation and exegesis. For example, the verse – إنا أنزلنا المال لإقامة الصلوة وإيتاء – الزكوة. ولو أن لابن آدم واديا لأحب أن يكون إليه الثاني ولو كان إليه الثاني لأحب أن يكون إليهما الثالث ولا يملأ جوف لم يكن الذين كفروا من أهل الكتاب والمشركين ومن لقيتهما لو أن ابن آدم سأل واديا من مال فأعطيه سأل ثانياً وإن سأل ثانياً فأعطيه سأل ثالثاً ولا يملأ جوف ابن آدم إلا التراب ويتوب الله على من تاب وإن ذات<sup>100</sup> was said to be available in a second version which stood as follows: لم يكن الذين كفروا من أهل الكتاب والمشركين ومن لقيتهما لو أن ابن آدم سأل واديا من مال فأعطيه سأل ثانياً وإن سأل ثانياً فأعطيه سأل ثالثاً ولا يملأ جوف ابن آدم إلا التراب ويتوب الله على من تاب وإن ذات<sup>101</sup> الدين عند الله الحنيفة غير اليهودية ولا النصرانية. ومن يعمل خيراً فلن يكفره.

Then there were the surahs about which it was said that for some reasons they had been taken away by Allah, or lost to human memory. Parts of those verses were also reproduced in reliable books of reports with reference to the most reliable among the Prophet's Companions. The following two verses of a supposed surah, reported by Abu Musa Ash'ari, were reproduced يا أيها الذين آمنوا لا تقولوا مالا تفعلون فتكتب شهادة في أعناقكم إن الله سيؤيد هذا الدين بأقوام لا خلاق لهم و لو أن لابن آدم واديين من مال لتمنى<sup>102</sup> and فتألون عنها يوم القيامة<sup>103</sup> The following fabricated ayah was attributed to Omer: لا ترغبوا عن آبائكم فإنه كفر بكم<sup>104</sup> Another fabricated verse attributed to him – إن جاهدوا كما جاهدتم أول مرة – was said to have been lost like other similar verses. Someone said that those surahs that have been erased from memory include both surah 'Al-Khal'a' and surah 'Al-Haqad' parts of which are still there in *Duae Qunoot*.<sup>105</sup> As to those verses about which it was said that they were revealed and then taken away, a long list of them was appended to the margins of many books of commentaries, along with their circumstances of revelation.<sup>106</sup> One famous verse from this family happens to be – بلغوا عنا قومنا أنا لقينا ربنا فرضي عنا وأرضانا<sup>107</sup> which has been recorded in *Tabari* and other books of exegesis.

The Qur'anic verses, whether they are abrogated or unabrogated, whether they are said to be inside the Qur'an or outside it, have in both the cases impacted upon our understanding of the Qur'an. It is not surprising for the ulama of a community who declared the deviating readings of the Qur'an as non-Othmanic and are inclined to derive commands from them or draw help in the analysis of the related verses, to be

influenced by this debate on the abrogator and the abrogated, and after designating the abrogated verse either as ‘abrogated by Allah’s commands’ (*mansukh al-hukm*) or as ‘abrogated by continuous tradition’ (*mansukh mutawaterah*) to make them a part of their religious thinking. This is so for the additional reason that in our exegetical or juristic literature, single-transmitter tradition is not enough to authenticate the Qur’an but one can derive commands from it. A significant example in this regard is the supposed verse regarding stoning to death that, despite being outside the Qur’an, has continued to influence Qur’anic understanding simply on the strength of the space it has occupied in books of history and exegesis. In our opinion, it is not permissible even to entertain this thought about the final Revelation that any part of it has either been abrogated or has become unworthy of practice. As a matter fact, these debates only lead to a dilution of our faith regarding the definitiveness of the Revelation. As the final Revelation, the Qur’an would remain the text of guidance until the very final hour of our earthly existence. It contains a clear account of the values on which the present and the future societies would be organized. This is the Book of guidance given to the followers of the last Prophet that would guide them in the absence of the Prophet till the Day of Judgment. Its status is that of the guide after the Prophet. To think about this important document that any part of it has become unreliable demonstrates an audacity that is un-thought of on the part of a believer. We often say that the cause of the decline of the Muslim community is that layers of different kinds of interpretation have obfuscated the light of the Revelation. The debates regarding the abrogator and the abrogated have also played some role in this regard.

### REVELATION AS HISTORY

We have discussed in some detail in the earlier pages how, after the initial centuries, efforts have been made continuously to obfuscate the grandeur of the Revelation through history and reports. Firstly, doubts were engendered about the essence of the Revelation, and secondly, the fabricated historical accounts regarding the compilation of the Qur’an reduced it from the status of a Divine Text to the Othmanic version. Moreover, the disagreement regarding its reading, the debates about the ‘seven textual parallels’ and finally the search for the abrogator and the abrogated verses had virtually kept the Revelation in the state of suspended animation. We have also pointed out how after the first few centuries of Islam, such reprehensible notions had made a permanent place in our religious thinking. So much so that even ulama of great renown, thinkers, jurists and exegetes came to believe in these fabricated accounts and fanciful tales. Exegetes gave space to them in the margins of their books thinking that

they were doing great service to the world of knowledge and jurists had no qualms in taking help from them in their understanding of the Qur'an. The upshot of all this was our faith (*iman*) in the sacredness and inviolability of the Qur'an became rather shaky. However, if the matter stopped here, then to deny these fabricated accounts, to declare them unreliable on the basis of historical analysis and intuitive knowledge, and then to start a movement for a return to the Qur'an as a definitive and immutable document would not have been difficult. But after accepting the fundamental importance of history and reports in the accepted elucidations of the Qur'an – which only enjoys the status of the standard and authentic parameter of understanding the Qur'an – it has become difficult to penetrate into the multi-layered interpretation of the revelation of the Qur'an.

This interference of history in the understanding of the Qur'an can be seen in the context of the importance given to the circumstances of or the causes for the Revelation. The recurrence of the phrase, 'it was revealed as' (*nazzalat fi kaza*) in exegetical literature has, to a great extent, reduced an eternal and timeless Text to a social and historical document. The greatest fallacy of this method is that the eternally manifest Divine Word became subservient to a fictive body of knowledge like history. Moreover, if there are several accounts that are presented as the supposed cause for the revelation of a particular verse, one sees no apparent reason as to which account should be preferred to others. Despite this, some scholars have declared it strictly forbidden (*haram*) to undertake interpretation of the Qur'an without the knowledge of the social context of revelation.<sup>108</sup> The majority of the ulama and the exegetes believe that as long as one is not familiar with the circumstances of revelation of a verse and its surrounding context, one cannot undertake a meaningful interpretation of that verse.<sup>109</sup> Some scholars, however, have rejected such heavy dependence on history, and there is no doubt that our jurists have always thought that the implications of the verses were valid for all circumstances beyond the immediate circumstances of revelation. The methods of analogical deduction (*qayas*) and preference (*istihsan*) taken recourse to by our jurists can be seen as an extension of the notion of the 'circumstances of revelation' (*shan nuzool*). However, it is an established fact that the reports regarding the circumstances of revelation play a key role in the understanding of the Qur'an even in cases of the jurists and the exegetes who have tried to see the Qur'an as universal message. By providing every verse a specific socio-historical context, we have not only put up a barrier of human interpretation around it, but also led the mind of the reader astray from the real import of the Qur'anic text. We would like to present some illustrations of it as we go on.

The exegetes justify their search for the social context of revelation by alluding to the fact that the Prophet's illustrious companions like Ali and Abdullah bin Mas'ud set great store by it. In some reports, these illustrious companions of the Prophet claimed that they had played a key role in making public the knowledge of the historical background of the verses. Of course, the tone and tenor of these reports make it obvious that they cannot have the remotest connection with such great personalities as Ali, Abdullah bin Mas'ud or Ubai bin Ka'b.<sup>110</sup> As regards the issue whether Ali had the knowledge of the circumstances of revelation of all the verses, the question may be asked as to what prevented him from writing them down. The fact is – the Prophet's Companions were perfectly aware that all the verses of the Qur'an are clear and perspicuous. If Allah or His Prophet did not feel the need for any explanatory or supplementary notes to it, how could the Prophet's Companions lay the foundation of interpretive and exegetical reports? In the circumstances, how could Ali say that he had the knowledge of the background of all the revealed verses, along with their circumstances of revelation, and that people should try to seek this knowledge from him?

The quest for the social context of revelation in the interpretation of the Qur'an assumed such importance that Imam Wahidi had to underline the fact that only those reports regarding the circumstances of revelation would be considered reliable whose origin and authenticity could be traced back to the Prophet's Companions. Imam Wahidi who was a scholar belonging to the fifth century hijra felt that many fabricated and fanciful accounts regarding the circumstances of revelation had crept into our books.<sup>111</sup> Although from Tabari down to the contemporary exegetes, the process of a critical evaluation and validation of these reports has always been active, it cannot be denied that these reports have been playing a key role in diverting people's attention away from the real meaning of the Qur'anic verses. One reason for this is the great confidence our ulama and exegetes reposed on history, and the second reason is that we have been accustomed to treat the commentaries of the Predecessors with utmost reverence, taking them to be the most authentic sources of our knowledge and understanding. Imam Wahidi himself, whose critical attitude we have just alluded to, displays such reverence towards them that he accepts the circumstances of revelation recounted by the Predecessors without any critical scrutiny. Thus, for the succeeding generation it becomes easier to move away further from the original contexts of the Qur'anic verses and search for meaning in the supposed historical background. For example, regarding the circumstances of revelation of the verse – *وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ* [2:114], he relies on the statement of Qatadah that this verse was revealed in the context of Bakht Nasr and his men under his leadership. The accounts

of their raid on Baitul Maqdis have been recorded in Jewish history. According to this report, the Roman Christians helped Bakht Nasr as his ally in destroying Baitul Maqdis. As recorded in historical accounts, the event of the spoilage of Baitul Maqdis took place 633 years before the birth of Christ. However, if it indicates the second destruction of Jerusalem, as it has been suspected by Qatada, it took place according to the Jewish sources in 70 CE. But Wahidi relied on his predecessors to some extent in determining the historical report to be the circumstances of revelation of the Qur'an. It allowed doubts to enter into the act of comprehending the Qur'an and rendered history appear as dubious.<sup>112</sup> There is another report transmitted on the authority of Ibn Abbas regarding the circumstances of this verse. It has been recorded as reported by Kalbi. The circumstances of revelation of this verse have referred to Taetus Rumi and his Christian companions who brought ruin to Baitul Maqdis in 70 CE and imposed a ban on the entry of the Jews therein.<sup>113</sup> On the authority of Ibn Abbas, there is, however, another report transmitted by Ata' which says that this verse was revealed in the context of the Meccan polytheists. The commentators of the Qur'an are of the opinion that Ibn Abbas here points to the event of the treaty of Hudaibia when the Muslims were forced to come back to Madina without performing their minor pilgrimage (umrah). It is difficult for common readers to decide which of the two reports transmitted on the authority of Ibn Abbas is more authentic. He cannot decide whether the expression 'masajid Allah' (houses of Allah) either refers to the 'holy House of Allah' (Ka'ba) or to Baitul Maqdis, or to both of them. Tabari, with the help of contradictory reports and sayings, reached the conclusion that the above expression refers to Christians who aided Bakht Nasr as his ally in bringing ruin to Baitul Maqdis.<sup>114</sup> There is no denying the fact that the Meccan polytheists were more reliable than Bakht Nasr. Thus, the commentators of the Qur'an hold the former to be more authentic. These reports, however, render such verse of the Qur'an as declares those who 'blocked the way to the House of Allah' as oppressors, as past history. It is the result of looking at a principle in historical perspective. The eternal messages of the Qur'an demand us to read and understand them as the guiding stars of our future life rather than the stories of the earlier communities.

The real objective of the Revelation, designated as 'clear light' (نُورًا مُبِينًا) and 'guide for humanity' (هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ), is that it should guide us in our individual and collective life. It should guide us in such a way that our journey from darkness to light takes place easily and effortlessly. Its stature does not behoove that it should stick to history or follow it.<sup>115</sup>

The political conflicts among different groups of Muslims constitute another cause for the distancing of the meaning of the Qur'anic verses by means of the circumstances

of their revelation. Being a foundational book, every political group wanted to read the story of their glory in it; conversely, they would excavate it to find arguments for taking a strong stand against their opponents. These political conflicts had led the followers of Othman and Ali to create an endless cycle of fabricated reports. The Muslims whose faith was feeble and the hypocrites, who had surrendered themselves before the rising might of Islam but did not accept it wholeheartedly, took active parts in the proliferation of these accounts. The Qur'an, as we have said, was there as a definitive and written text that left no scope for addition or alteration. Thus, for the mischief-makers, there was only one way left and that was that they tried to institute changes in the meaning of the Qur'an by fabricating stories that would be taken recourse to in the understanding of the Qur'an. For example, it is said about Marwan that he made Abdur Rahman bin Abi Bakr the verifier of the following verse from surah Ahqaf – وَالَّذِي قَالَ لِيُؤَدِّيهِ أَفٌ لَّكُمَا أَتَعِدَانِي أَنْ أُخْرَجَ وَقَدْ خَلَتِ الْقُرُونُ مِنْ قَبْلِي وَهُمَا يَسْتَكْبِرَانِ اللَّهُ وَبِئْسَ مَا يَكْفُرُ [46:17]. According to Zamakhshari, this could have been so because Abdur Rahman bin Abi Bakr was among the political opponents of the Umayyad tribe who had declared that allegiance to Yezid was tantamount to allegiance to Kaiser and Kisra.<sup>116</sup> However, declaring a venerable Muslim as the verifier of the above verse cannot be approved under any circumstances. In order to justify his opposition and prove his political views to be fallible and inferior, Marwan also resorted to the circumstances of revelation.

Another instance of the use of the social context of the Revelation can be seen in the concept of *ahl-e bait* (the prophet's household), the concept that the *ahl-e bait* encompasses Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain whom Allah has purified of all sins and given them the status of the 'innocent'. No evidence from the Qur'an could have been adduced in support of this dynasty-worship. It was not possible to make such a seminal fact reliable simply on the basis of reports and history and make it a part of the belief system of a segment of Muslims as long as some internal evidence from the Qur'an could not be provided in its support. Therefore, circumstances of revelation became a convenient tool towards that end. Not only that, it became so common to believe that *ahl-e bait* meant Fatima's lineage that now in the most reliable books of *ahl-e sunnah* and in the margins of exegetical treatises it finds mention as an authenticated and established concept.<sup>117</sup> It was said in the verse of surah Ahzab – إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا [33:33]; the background of the concluding part is this that Allah revealed it in appreciation of the descendants of Fatima and to establish their eternal piety and holiness. This report finds mention in almost all celebrated commentaries of the Qur'an with slight linguistic and stylistic variations, that the



Prophet covered Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain with a single sheet, looked up at the sky and said – اللهم هؤلاء أهل بيتي فأذهب عنهم الرجس وطهرهم تطهيرا – As recorded in the reports, this is the occasion of the revelation of *ayah tatheer* (verse relating to the holiness of *ahle-e bait*). This event has also been mentioned as the occasion of the revelation of this verse by Tabari, Qurtabi and Alusi. Some commentators of the Qur'an have also included the holy wives of the Prophet in the line of his descendants, whereas others are of the opinion that it implies the lineage of Banu Hashim. There is no denying the fact that these reports regarding the circumstances of revelation have led many people from both the sects, Shia as well as Sunni, to believe in the distorted concept of the descendants of the Prophet. Though in the Qur'an the expression *ahle-e bait* implies the holy wives of the Prophet, as is evident in the following verse – يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ إِن كُنْتُمْ – نُزِّلَ [33:28]. At another place in the Qur'an the angels invoked blessings on to the wife of Abraham and here is the verse – هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن تَدْعُونَ دُونِيَ إِذْ أُنزِلَ عَلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ آيَاتٍ فَذَكَرْتَهُ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَتَّخِذُ لَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِيًّا مَّأْسُومِينَ ۚ أُو۟لَئِكَ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَنَ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْكَاذِبِينَ ۚ [3:61]. As mentioned therein, the Prophet came out for *mubahila* with Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain but due to the clarity in the verse – أُو۟لَئِكَ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَنَ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْكَاذِبِينَ ۚ [3:61], the act of coming out of Omer and Abu Bakr along with other elderly companions also finds a mention. These reports also indicated the fact that *mubahila* was a notional challenge. It didn't occur in reality because the opponents did not have the heart to accept the challenge. The notion of Fatima's descendents being in the line of the Prophet's descendants enjoys a special status in the canon of our belief due to repeated descriptions of the descendants of Fatima, the event of *kisaa*, the Prophet's act of keeping Umm Salma out of the sheet, as it goes in a few reports, or including the descendants of Hashim in the line of the Prophet's descendants. Despite the critical evaluation of the matter by the commentators and the traditionists, the sheer frequency of these self-contradictory events and their mention in the commentaries of the Qur'an have ensured that the

issue is kept alive. The same reports about the social context of revelation provide the basis for some of the Muslims' belief that Husain and his descendants are innocent imams who are equally reliable for *ahl-e sunnah wal-jama't*.

The reports regarding the social context of revelation not only interfere seriously with the understanding of the Qur'an, but also they portray a wrong picture of the Prophet's social life and the socio-political environment of the time. As for their authenticity, they do not deserve to be discussed with any seriousness. However, the initial commentators who wanted to understand each verse against its social background, or who recorded all kinds of contradictory and unconvincing accounts in their footnotes in order to preserve them for the future commentators, created great problems for their successors. The commentators had got accustomed to record all kinds of reports, whether feeble or proper. With the passage of time, the traditionists had no other way open to them except for scrutinising the general acceptability transmitters that they had gained in course of time, in order to sift the genuine reports from spurious ones. There is no denying the fact that our traditionists have shown extraordinary grit and tenacity in this endeavour, but it is also true that in their critical evaluation and scrutiny of the traditions they often became captive to the principles formulated by them. The upshot of this was that many reports that went counter to the comprehension of the Qur'an were treated as feeble and recorded too. Once these reports made space in the horizon of our thinking and in the footnotes of exegetical treatises, it became difficult for the later generations to separate these feeble traditions and the fabricated social background from their understanding of the Qur'an. A telling illustration of this group of reports is provided by the accounts related to the 'verse of *ila'*' that presents a horrifying picture of the social life of the Prophet who was endowed with sublime morals. In surah Baqara, people have been exhorted against taking oath on trivial matters. It was pointed out that if a person took the oath that he would not go to his wife, then he should keep this vow for four months. But it would be considered better if he normalises the relationship even earlier, as Allah is Most Benevolent and Kind: [2:225]. لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبْتُمْ قُلُوبِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ

The principles of social life posited in these verses are quite obvious. One does not require any background knowledge or the circumstances of their revelation to understand them. But the reports regarding their circumstances of revelation have it that the Prophet had taken the oath to the effect that he would not visit the holy wives, and had stayed away from them for a month. Apart from exegetical treatises, several reports to this effect are available in the books of traditions, even in *Bukhari*. Though the traditionists have raised doubts about the transmitters of these reports most of

whom such as Ibn Juraij, Shahab Zahri, Hameed Al-Taweel were, according to the latest researches in the area, extremely unreliable. But the fact is – in numerous books of exegesis, this account has been recorded in varying details to serve as the background to these verses. These fanciful and fabricated accounts present us with a picture of the Prophet's family life rife with discord and crises, so much so that he had to stay away from each one of his wives for as long as a whole month. In the Prophet's personality we get the image of a tyrant before whom his closest companions could not dare open their mouths. Though he was the Prophet of Allah and the verse – لَا تَرْفَعُوا – أَصْوَاتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ النَّبِيِّ [49:2] was revealed in his honour, his own wives retaliated to him and made his life a hell. So much so that Omer had to intervene. This fanciful account, with many variations, finds mention in different books of history and reports. It is actually Shahab Zahri who is credited with giving this anecdote all the ingredients of a palatable story.<sup>118</sup> Neither is this account corroborated by history, nor is it consistent with the image of the Prophet in whose praise the Qur'an itself is so eloquent. These fabricated accounts do not contribute to the understanding of the Qur'an in any way; on the contrary, the opponents of Islam get sufficient ammunitions from this fabricated history for attacking Muslims in the footnotes of many authentic commentaries.

The reports regarding the 'context' of revelation presents a social environment at the time of the Prophet in Medina where calumny, scandal mongering, backbiting and other social evils were very common. Although there are detailed instructions revealed in the Qur'an to restrict these evils, the portrayal of the society as reflected in these reports does not indicate that these divine instructions were implemented. One gets the impression that it was difficult for decent women to go out of their houses as men would whistle seeing them in public. To distinguish decent women from slaves, the verse related to veil (*ayah Jilbab*) was revealed.<sup>119</sup> If one wants to have some idea of the non-Qur'anic society of Medina during the Prophet's lifetime, it would be enough to look at the explanatory comments in the footnotes of the verse of *ifk* and the verse of *jilbab*. There is such a glut of reports relating to the verse of *ifk* according to which this verse was revealed to confirm Ayisha's chastity. All these reports that have been narrated by Shahab Zahri and that are scattered not only in the footnotes of exegetical treatises but also in the authentic books of traditions, tell us how Ayisha was left behind in a battle expedition that allowed the opponents of Islam to spread calumny against her character. This false propaganda brought on a crisis situation even in the Muslim society. According to these reports doubts were engendered even in the mind of the Prophet regarding Ayisha's chastity, and he did not show her the same affection as before. For many days, Ayisha did not understand the reason for the Prophet's changed attitude

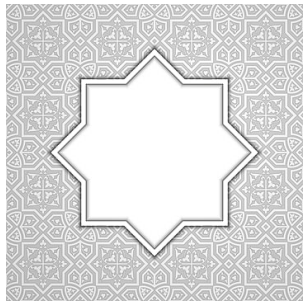
towards her. Only when she went to her mother's house did she come to know about the calumny that was being spread against her. Though it is asserted that all these reports ultimately show Ayisha to be innocent, they present the image of a Prophet who remains in the grip of calumny and rumours for a long time. Some of his companions certainly came forward to help him, but their approach to the issue was such that instead of resolving it they created an atmosphere of vulgarity. The Prophet of the time becomes a victim of doubts and misgivings about his wife's chastity simply because he shows himself credulous enough to believe in baseless rumours and does not feel the need to overcome this crisis with the help of the knowledge contained in the Qur'an!<sup>120</sup>

In some reports, the background of this verse was said to be Maria Qibtiya who had a child by her cousin. Imam Muslim has also recorded this kind of report in *Kitab Al-Tawba* (Book of Penitence) where it is said that the Prophet sent Ali to kill an accused, but Ali had come to know about the former being impotent. So he desisted from killing him. Some reporters are of the opinion that the circumstances of revelation concern the exemption of Fatima. According to some Shiite reports the false accusation of unchastity circulated against Ayisha was actually true. After the emergence of Imam Mahdi she would be brought back to life for the imposition of punishment.<sup>121</sup> Different commentaries on the Qur'an abound in such baseless references on the circumstances of the revelation of various verses of the Qur'an.

The reports regarding the circumstances of revelation not only delimited the meaning of the Qur'anic verses, but also often changed the focus of the Revelation. An eloquent example of this is provided by the reports recorded in the context of *muawwizatain*. These two chapters that impress upon the human mind Allah's unity through varying linguistic and stylistic devices, have been transformed into the verses of 'magic potions' as a result of foregrounding their so-called circumstances of revelation. There will hardly be any exegetical treatise that is devoid of the description of this particular merit of *muawwizatain*, as they provide defence against a plethora of evils like black magic, spell, evil eye etc. In this context, we have already made a critical assessment of the fabricated account regarding the fact that a spell was cast on the Prophet. Although some commentators have denied this event as it raises questions about his Apostleship. However, all the commentators, whether they believe in the account of a spell being cast on the Prophet or not, are almost unanimous in their view that the verses in question do provide defences against evils, and they have full potentiality to counter evils like black magic, spell, evil eye etc.<sup>122</sup> As to the question of the verses' theme and the deeper issues discussed in therein, our attention is hardly drawn towards them.

*SECTION IV*

*Hadith*



# مِثْلَهُ مَعَهُ: The Search for Revelation outside of it

﴿فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

The Qur'an which is the most perfect expression of the Islamic system of belief contains no suggestion, either direct or by implication, for an alternative source of the faith. Regarding the Prophetic model, the thought of Ayisha – <sup>1</sup> كان خلقه القرآن – in fact, points to the fact that the different facets of the Prophetic model that we now interpret as the sunnah, are preserved in the immortal pages of the Qur'an itself. Despite the presence of the Qur'an, the search for the Prophetic model in the sayings and the practices of the Prophet would amount to giving precedence to history over the Revelation. It would also amount to the quest of an alternative source of the Revelation outside the genuine one which neither the Prophet nor his noble caliphs had recommended for the community, and which, despite its supposed profundity and grandeur, was a product of human efforts. History, however authentic, can never be as reliable as the Revelation. Now, between the two important pillars of the faith, if one gives the impression to the people of being defective, then it would be considered to be some lack in the faith itself. We cannot think of showing such daring regarding the faith of Muhammad even in our wildest imagination. Thus, we are not left with any other alternative except that we undertake a review of the reports that suggest that there is another source of Revelation outside the Revelation per se, and they insist so much on this stance that the Qur'an could be its only victim.

We feel that the thought of using history as *wahi ghair matlu* (non-recital and/or non-canonical Revelation) was the product of the time when, in the prevailing climate of general confusion and political conflicts among different groups of people had to take the help of authenticated history in support of their own points of view. Otherwise, if the concept of the Prophet's sunnah outside the Qur'an was a familiar one in the Muslim society, then there would not have been so many conflicting statements about it. And if the sunnah had really been an entity outside the Qur'an

then there was no reason why the venerable caliphs would allow Muslims to have remained deprived of this source of guidance. They would not have left this foundational task to be undertaken much later by their followers (*tab'ain*) and then the followers of their followers (*tabe tab'ain*), and that, too, by the individual efforts and through individual preferences of the traditionists, without supervision and scrutiny by a central authority or an agency appointed by the caliph or the administrator of the time, that resulted in numerous compilation of the texts of the sunnah rather than any genuine and consensual compilation or series of compilations of it.

The conventional concept of the Prophet's sunnah under the impact of which we have begun to excavate it in the books of reports and practices, came into being at such a late stage in our cultural history that we cannot yet consider the debates on it to have become conclusive. For scholars of tradition, the four limits of the Prophet's sunnah are yet to be determined. If one group of scholars consider the Prophet's utterances, acts and discourses to constitute the sunnah,<sup>2</sup> another group holds the view that apart from the utterances, acts and discourses, the silences of the Prophet can also be adduced for the determination of the sunnah.<sup>3</sup> Some think that for the determination of the sunnah, both the human and the apostolic aspects of his being have equal validity<sup>4</sup> whereas others do not think the Prophet's human aspect to be of equal importance<sup>5</sup> as that of the apostolic aspect, and they present the incident of Bahirah and some fabricated traditions in support of their view.<sup>6</sup> According to another group of Islamic scholars the sunnah certainly encompasses the sayings, actions and discourses of the Prophet, but it will be applicable only to those things that are not found in the Qur'an: *والسنة هذا هي ما صدر عن النبي غير القرآن*.<sup>7</sup> From this variety of interpretation of the sunnah, one gets the impression that the terminology of the sunnah, engendered by history, still awaits a consensual and definitive definition. Where does the human aspect of the Prophet end and the apostolic aspect begin? Is the Prophetic model envisaged in the Qur'an totally devoid of a definition of the sunnah? These are the questions that will remain there even after accepting history as the immortal source of *wahi ghair matlu*. To accept the condition of 'things that are not found in the Qur'an' for sunnah would clearly mean that we are willfully ignoring the most authentic source of the Prophetic model, i.e., the Qur'an. If it were so, then this whole endeavor should be termed as the willful dismissal of the sunnah rather than its quest. To become a prisoner of the interpretation of Revelation rather than the Revelation itself, and to seek light from one's own analysis and interpretation of history is tantamount to a kind of unconscious idolatry. As it is not possible for the idols to fulfil our prayers, it is not possible for history to discharge the lofty function of the Revelation.



Conferring a sacred status to the Revelation resulted in not only distracting our attention from the genuine Revelation but also it resulted in the intrusion of a lot of misconceptions in our cultural and intellectual heritage. The attention of the traditionists and jurists was concentrated on these fabricated and speculative debates that had hardly any bearing on religion, and there would have been no lacuna in the understanding of this true faith, i.e., Islam if there were no debates on such issues. Interminable debates took place on the issues that had been kept out of the Qur'an or acts on which the Qur'an is absolutely silent. For instance, various reports regarding touching of the male organ with one's own hand (*masse zakar*) were recorded in the books of traditions that were made the subjects of their research by the jurists. There was so much inconsistency in these reports that there was no possibility of any consensus on them. Perhaps, their main objective was to keep people busy in these unnecessary and controversial matters and distract them from the main issues. Even after long-winding debates and researches for many centuries these matters still await conclusive discussions for their resolution. If the Shafeites prefer to believe that the purity of ablution is lost because of the touching of organs in the state of arousal,<sup>8</sup> the Hanafites offer a different Hadith in support of their view according to which the male organ is also regarded as a part of the body.<sup>9</sup> What, then, could be done to establish the precedence of one Hadith over the other? Critical analysis of these reports or any attempt of correlating the conflicting versions (*t'adeel*), are all parameters born of history. One cannot either absolutely contradict or corroborate history through historical parameters. It is like a two-edged sword that can be used by both the parties in question. If the Revelation does not make them issues of its discussion, then the different schools of Jurisprudence would continue to formulate principles of refutation and adjustment to declare the traditions not supporting their view as feeble. They would continue to call the evidence and arguments weak that do not endorse their stance.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in the context of the issue whether the ablution would be invalidated by touch Imam Tahawi, supporting the Hanafite School, had declared all the reports pertaining to the rival point of view as weak. Similarly, Imam Bahaiqi (d. 458), of the Shafei school of thought, judged it enough to dismiss all of Tahawi's arguments by declaring – ان علم الحديث لم يكن من صناعته – *Hadith* is not Imam Tahawi's field. Another instance of this kind was the controversy regarding the view whether the purity of ablution is lost if one ate something cooked in fire. According to a report by Abu Huraira, the Prophet's instruction was <sup>11</sup> توضحوا مما مست النار whereas another report attributed to the same Abu Huraira the Prophet had eaten a piece of cheese and then performed his prayer without undertaking another ablution,<sup>12</sup> that went to prove that

one did not lose the purity of ablution if one ate anything cooked on fire. In this regard, there is another quite familiar Hadith – لا صلوة لمن لا وضوء له ولا وضوء لمن لم يذكر اسم الله عليه,<sup>13</sup> i.e., prayer is not permissible without ablution. Those who did not consider *bismillah* as the key to ablution opined that this act was not corroborated by the Prophet's practice. It is said that when the refugees from Qanfaz had greeted the Prophet while he was doing ablution, he first finished the ablution and then responded to their greetings, and said, "There was no other reason for responding to your greeting belatedly except the fact that I do not like to pray to Allah without ablution."<sup>14</sup> When scholars tried to correlate these conflicting reports (*tatbeeq*), the issue became even more complicated. And the opposition between Hadith and sunnah got accentuated.<sup>15</sup> The need of declaring one of these two conflicting views as the more reliable and authentic manifestation of the sunnah made scholars turn to the wisdom of pontiffs and scribes and their ways of interpretation of the faith. Thus, in practice, it so happened that the presence of these conflicting reports in the books of tradition paved the way for the jurisprudence of pontiffs in the faith of Muhammad. A need arose for scholars who would be knowledgeable about the intricate details of the faith, experts in the art of *rijal* and perfectly at ease in the boundless sea of reports so that they could judge which one among the many conflicting reports had precedence over others, and thus it would be easier for common people to stay on the right path. It was also considered an essential qualification for these experts that they should have the knowledge to undertake *tatbeeq*, and also the knowledge about which ones among the sunnah were the abrogators and which ones, the abrogated. As Imam Tahawi had alerted us to the fact that in the beginning, it was considered that one had lost one's purity of ablution if one ate anything cooked in fire, but this instruction was later abrogated. We have already pointed out that history cannot abrogate or endorse itself. The scholarly excavations of jurists and traditionists could not settle these controversial issues for ever. The method of *tatbeeq* undertaken by the traditionists, their historical insights and expertise in Islamic jurisprudence were not equally acceptable to all the schools of thought. Often it so happened that when the judgment over a Hadith went against the views of a particular school, the members of that school cast aspersions on the integrity of the scholars and jurists. Thus, all the efforts undertaken by the experts in the field to bridge the gulf created by the surfeit of conflicting reports remained unsuccessful.

The declaration of the supposed reports of the books of sunnah as the source of Shariah resulted in the marginalization of the Revelation; secondly, it paved the way for the intrusion of the pontifical jurisprudence in Islam; thirdly, a case was made for

incorporating the knowledge of the abrogated Shariah and the reliable and unreliable points of view emanating from the Shariah. To borrow the words of Imam Shaiba, it was a situation pointing to which he had said to his disciples, كلما تقدمتم في الحديث تأخرتم, عن القرآن.<sup>16</sup> One of the objectives of the advent of the Prophet was to release people from juristic complications and to declare the sayings and actions of the Rabbis and Pharisees as null and void, but his followers paved the way for the revival of the earlier Shariahs through history and practices. It was said that شرع من قبلنا شرعنا ما لم ينكر. In the reliable books of traditions such incidents relating to the Israelites were recorded that, from the Islamic point of view, were intended to serve as evidence for the community of the Prophet. For instance, Bukhari recorded the following tradition through Abu Huraira: إن رجلا من بني إسرائيل سأل بعض بني إسرائيل أن يسلفه ألف دينار فدفعها إليه فخرج في البحر فلم يجد مركبا فأخذ خشبة فنقرها فأدخل فيها ألف دينار. فرمى في البحر فخرج الرجل الذي أسلفه فإذا بالخشبة فأخذها لأهله حطباً فذكر الحديث فلما نشر الحطب وجد المال.<sup>17</sup> From these precedents of the earlier communities, Bukhari reached the conclusion that since the Prophet simply narrated this account without any comment as to whether one fifth of the objects taken out of the sea should be given away, and as شرع من قبلنا شرعنا ما لم ينكر was regarded as an established principle, the traditionists and jurists exempted people from giving away one-fifth of the stuff taken out of the sea, in the light of the above incident. This tradition of drawing upon the earlier Shariah slowly became an established method in the books of tradition so that in some cases, the presence of definite instruction and clear verses in the Qur'an was not able to prevent this cycle of borrowing from the fabricated Shariah or declare it null and void. As it is said in the case of *rajm* that drawing upon the Shariah of the Israelites, the Prophet kept the penalty in vogue. Those who think that history has precedence over the Revelation or who consider history to be an interpretation of the Revelation or who think that declaring history as an inferior entity might harm the cause of Muhammad's religion do not find any difficulty in having faith in such ludicrous thoughts that *ayah rajm* was indeed revealed but could not find entry into the Qur'an, or that *ayah rajm* is abrogated for recitation, though its functionality (*hukm*) still remains valid. Though declaring this would amount to questioning the grandeur and sanctity of the Qur'an those who give history the status of *wahi ghair matlu* and who insist on giving it the status of the only genuine elucidation and interpretation of the Revelation, cannot have any other option except falling victims to delusions and ambiguity regarding the timeless Revelation, i.e., the Qur'an in their effort to give credence to history.

For declaring history as the source of the Faith, it was necessary that instead of regarding it as mere history it should be seen as authenticated history. The efforts of

traditionists towards formulating the principles of Hadith and separate it from history through textual and contextual analysis and checking the authenticity of the transmitters (*jir'h wa ta'deel*) had at least done this service that they raised a question mark on the validity of a wide range of fake and fabricated traditions. Specific books were compiled just to list the fake and fabricated traditions and thus fabricators were effectively confined to the trashcans of history. However, this belief gained ground that the reports that passed the scrutiny of critical principles and the methods of testing at different stages and then got entry into the books of sayings and practices were reflections of *wahi ghair matlu*. If the Qur'an is the kernel, then the compilations of the traditions were its authentic explanation and interpretation. As this belief was widespread, even the feeblest of the Hadith was preferred on the basis of analogical deduction (*qiyas*). It was ignored that those Hadith that were regarded as feeble by the traditionists would not be considered to be the Prophet's utterances or practices at all, but a kind of slander on him. Then, the critical principles that the traditionists had devised were reflections of their own objectives, personal insights, their understanding of the Faith and their own mental levels. These principles of criticism differed from traditionist to traditionist, and often became a cause of dispute in matters of *jir'h* and *ta'deel* and the verification of evidence. To take conclusive decisions in matters of faith on the basis of this human method of scrutiny would amount to giving extraordinary importance to history and according precedence to human judgments over the Revelation. As the reports got the status of evidence and the human methods of *jir'h* and *ta'deel* came into vogue, it led to the belief that the compilations of traditions represented the genuine sources of the utterances of the Prophet. In future years this interpretive literature was looked upon by the traditionists and the jurists as the most comprehensive guide in the conduct of daily life and the issues and problems encountered in it.<sup>18</sup> It was considered sufficient for a mujtahid to have knowledge of a vast number of Hadith and the practices of the Prophet's Companions. It is said that when it was asked of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal whether the knowledge of one hundred thousand Hadith would qualify any one to issue a decree (*fatwa*), he answered in the negative. However, he opined that if one had knowledge of five hundred thousand Hadith, then he could be qualified for such a position.<sup>19</sup> One consequence of according history such extraordinary importance was that the Qur'an was practically dismissed as *the Book of Guidance*. The complex knowledge of Prophetic utterances and practices, the memorizing of hundred thousands of Hadith and their scrutiny, the knowledge of *jir'h* and *ta'deel*, the very intricate method of harmonization between conflicting and contradictory reports – all these turned the simple religion of Islam into the Mishnah

of Mishnahs. In those circumstances it was considered advisable to abide by the inferences of the Predecessors instead of groping in the boundless sea of sayings and practices. Around the Qur'an, which was, the definitive and familiar Book had already grown such a thick jungle of Mishnahic literature that the religion of Islam had already become a prey to the machinations of Pharisees and Rabbis. When the interpretation of the Revelation becomes dependent on history, then history which is an ever-growing jungle, leads to a situation when the specialized ulema take upon themselves the responsibility of interpreting the religion. This precedence of history over the Revelation created a situation similar to the one created by the Rabbis and the Pharisees through the accumulation of the voluminous and complex Talmudic literature, where the Rabbis had taken upon themselves the role of interpreting religion rather than facilitating its understanding. They had transcended the role of judges or scholars and had become the religious authority.

#### HISTORY AND THE ABROGATION OF THE QUR'ANIC VERSES

The conferment of authenticity on history through the sunnah and according it the status of the only reliable interpretation of the Qur'anic revelation led to the logical question that if there is a dispute between the Qur'an and the sunnah, the two sources of the Revelation according to this view, then between these two entities which one would settle the issue? According to the notion of authenticated history, the compilations of Hadith had gained the status of *wahi ghair matlu*, and it was accepted that if the Qur'an was the condensed version (of the Revelation), Hadith represented it in details. Through reference to the Qur'anic verse – لَشَيْبَانَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ – scholars and commentators accorded this aspect of the sunnah the status of an established principle, and this notion got widespread currency among the cognoscenti that متى وقع تعارض بين القرآن والحديث وجب تقديم الحديث لأن القرآن مجمل والحديث مبين<sup>20</sup>. When history, through *wahi ghair matlu*, was given the status of the evidence of the Qur'anic interpretation, it led to a state of affairs where, in a way, the Revelation stood abrogated by history. When history was thought to be benign and true, it acquired the right not only to determine the meaning of the Qur'an and delimit the bounds of the Revelation through references to the circumstances of revelation and the fabricated reports regarding different levels of reading, but also to declare, whenever it wanted, its judgments about the abrogation of the Revelation on the basis of reports. In the history of the understanding of the Qur'an there is no dearth of the instances when the Revelation fell a prey to history like this. We will content ourselves with proffering only a few examples from them here.

First of all, take the verse regarding inheritance. In the Qur'an, in surah Baqarah, it has been enjoined upon Muslims in solemn words – كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ إِنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةَ لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ [2:180]. At another place, in surah Maeda, it has been stressed that a person preparing a will should arrange for witnesses, and then the witnesses were exhorted to discharge their duties truthfully and honestly: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا شَهَادَةُ بَيْنِكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ حِينَ الْوَصِيَّةِ [5:106]. These two verses of the Qur'an, revealed on two different occasions, make it obligatory on the believers to institute wills before their death, in the interest of justice and fair play, and also make proper arrangements for the implementation of the provision made in the wills. However, it is surprising to notice that our traditionists and commentators consider these verses related to inheritance as abrogated, and present a fabricated tradition – لَا وَصِيَّةَ لَوَارِثٍ as the abrogator. Some even opine that the principle of division through the principles of inheritance described in surah Nisa, in fact, indicate that the deceased had, at that stage, no right to institute any will, although the said verse addresses the issue of death whereas determinants of the principles of the division of legacy are said to be the prevalent society, the administration of the time and the legatees. Then, in the verses, the people described as shareholders in the legacy are bound by *من بعد وصية* which makes it clear that the verses were revealed keeping in mind the highest standard of the principles of inheritance and the desirability of instituting a will before death. A commandment that confirms or ratifies an earlier commandment cannot be regarded as its abrogator. Thus, no verses from the Qur'an can be adduced to abrogate the verses on inheritance. However, those who believe that the command regarding inheritance has already been abrogated and who wrote their juristic interpretation according to this understanding are left with no alternative except to take shelter in the Hadith, *لا وصية لوارث* which, according to them, enjoys the authority of an abrogator and which, in practice, has abrogated these Qur'anic verses for centuries.

It should also be noted that the authenticity of the said Hadith that was regarded as the abrogator of the verses on inheritance is highly doubtful. The three books of traditions – *Muatta*, *Muslim* and *Bukhari* – compiled by the most venerable traditionists are devoid of this report. In *Tirmizi*, *Abu Dawood*, *Ibn Maja* and *Nasei*, the traditions on this issue have certainly been recorded through three disparate sources. Abu Dawood, in fact, foregrounds this issue by using it as the chapter heading – *باب في نسخ الوصية للوالدين والأقربين*. But there is such inconsistency and contradiction in the texts of these reports that it would alone be enough to declare them unreliable. For instance, in *Bukhari*, the following statement by Ibn Abbas, *كان المال للولد وكانت الوصية* cannot, by any means, be considered a commentary on the verses

on inheritance, where the close relatives have also been included along with the parents, in the legacy. Ibn Abbas's statement that كان المال للولد could have been a description of the situation before the advent of Islam when the daughters were not included in the list of heirs. Apart from this, in the traditions reported by Abu Imama Al-Bahli, Amar bin Kharja and Anas bin Malik, and recorded in *Tirmizi*, *Ibn Maja*, *Nasei* and *Abu Dawood*, there is such inconsistency and internal contradictions and the identity of reporters is so dubious that these factors are enough to consider these reports unreliable.<sup>21</sup> If history that cannot be established as authentic even according to historical principles is declared as the key to the understanding of the Revelation, it would amount to the abrogation of the rights of the Revelation itself. Despite the internal weaknesses of these reports, the extraordinary regard with which the scholars treat them, particularly the chapter 'لا وصية لوارث' in *Bukhari* (though any Hadith related to the issue have not been incorporated therein) that has made them known to all and sundry, that despite their inadequacies on the parameters of testing they have reached the stage of being 'beneficial' (*mustafiz*). According to the traditionists and Islamic scholars, when a report, however weak, becomes so widely known that it achieves universal acceptability, it is said to have reached the stage of being *mustafiz*, after which it requires no evidence. The way the widespread fame of لا وصية لوارث has rendered the verses on inheritance frozen, suspended, even rejected cannot be said to be the solitary example demonstrating the rejection of the Revelation at the hands of history.

A second notable example in this context is that of the general and widely accepted view regarding *kalalah*, a view born purely of reports and history. As a matter of fact, it has overshadowed the Qur'anic definition of *kalalah* even in the eyes of renowned Islamic scholars and commentators. In the exegetical treatises the definition of *kalalah* as – من لا ولد له ولا والد – enjoys the near-consensus of the Islamic scholars and exegetes. According to them, a deceased that has no living parents or offspring is called *kalalah*. The surfeit of reports on this issue and the common perception regarding it among the scholars actuated the lexicographers also to promote this meaning or interpretation of the term. However, the definition of the term available in the Qur'an is as follows: [4:176], i.e. the childless deceased who has brothers or sisters or both as heirs is called *kalalah*. If the deceased is called *kalalah* in the sense of the past owner of the inheritance, the brothers and sisters are *kalalah* in the sense of his/her heirs. However, this very clear definition of *kalalah* is generally not found in the books of exegesis and jurisprudence. The precedence gained by history over the Revelation can be gauged from the fact that while elucidating the verse – وَإِنْ كَانَ رَجُلٌ يُورَثُ كَاللَّاهِ أَوْ امْرَأَةٌ وَلَهُ أُخٌ أَوْ أُخْتٌ فَلِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا الشُّدُسُ

opined that here 'brother' and 'sister' have been used in the sense of 'from the same mother', i.e. half-brothers and half-sisters. Rather, some reports have it that Sa'd bin Abi Waqas used to read it along with the phrase, *من أمه*.<sup>22</sup> Someone claimed that the phrase *من أمه* was there in the version of Ubai bin Ka'b, though it cannot be found in the current available versions of the Qur'an. Whether one believes or doesn't believe in this kind of fabrication and falsehood relating to the Qur'anic text, it is undeniable that almost all the commentators have drawn on this fabricated version of Ubai bin Ka'b in their understanding of the verse. Those who want to play safe and stay away from this falsehood try to take the easy way out by declaring that the Islamic scholars and exegetes have already reached consensus on the implication of the phrase *من أمه* as foster-brothers and foster-sisters and the matter should end there. This non-Qur'anic understanding of the term *kalalah* on the basis of unreliable, even damaging (to the Revelation) reports, and the seeming consensus of the community on it has engendered a very complex debate on the issue of *Hajib wa Mahjoob* – who should be deprived and how? To tell the truth, this has remained a contentious issue for the commentators and the jurists for centuries, and has divided the juristic schools who are engaged in an internecine battle amongst themselves. By ignoring the Qur'anic concept of *kalalah* and accepting a fabricated version of the verse, the scholars have not only overlooked the Qur'anic worldview, but led the community to a blind alley of history from which there seems to be no way out today. In the light of the gravity of the problem and the parochialism of history, it was justifiably expected of the latter-day followers that after a rigorous scrutiny of history at every stage they would, perhaps, find a way for a return to the Qur'anic worldview. But history blocked their way by asserting that this mess was not engendered by it but by the Revelation itself. And, according to some reports, even Omer had left the world with a sense of regret for not having clarified the issue of *kalalah* from the Prophet.<sup>23</sup> This aggressive attack of history on the Qur'an and the acceptance of fabricated traditions slowly led to the impression of the Qur'an as an incomprehensible Book and the community began to depend more on the sayings and practices for the conduct of the collective life of its members.

Another instance of the abrogation of the Qur'anic instruction at the hands of history is provided by the prohibition of hunting for those in the state of *ihram*. The Qur'an has clearly forbidden hunting in the state of *ihram* as follows: *لَا تَقْتُلُوا الصَّيْدَ وَأَنْتُمْ* *حُرْمًا*, and further added in the same verse – *وَحُرْمَ عَلَيْكُم صَيْدُ الْبَرِّ مَا دُمْتُمْ حُرْمًا* – . After this clear instruction regarding the prohibition of hunting on land in the state of *ihram*, there is no way left for the believers to circumvent it. However, the accumulation of saying and practices have not only diluted this instruction through the narration of different



events, but have shown, in many reports, people in the state of *ihram* aiding others in hunting. And this certainly demonstrates the impact of the Rabbinic scholars on Islamic thinking. The Qur'an prohibits hunting in unambiguous words, but the reports raise the question if people in the state of *ihram* are not allowed to hunt, how far are they allowed to aid others in their hunting? Nearly all the books of *Sehah* record the incident through Abu Qatadah as to how he was indirectly helped by the people in the state of *ihram* in his hunting. This was because being in the state of *ihram*, they could not have helped him in any direct or demonstrative way. It is said that Abu Qatadah was not in the state of *ihram*, but his companions who were in the state of *ihram* sighted the wild ass. They wanted that Abu Qatadah should see it, but his eyes were turned away from it. Under these circumstances if they had informed Qatadah about the ass they would be accused of helping him in his hunting, which was not permissible for people in the state of *ihram*. They also did not want Qatadah to lose the game. So, they started laughing together loudly to draw Qatadah's attention towards them. This device proved fruitful; Qatadah killed the game and all of them partook of its flesh. Later, when the Prophet was asked about this, he wanted to know if anyone among those in the state of *ihram* made any gesture towards Qatadah. From this incident Bukhari deduced in the heading of the section that it was forbidden for people in the state of *ihram* to participate in hunting, but it was permissible to draw the attention of the hunter towards the game by laughing. The title of Bukhari's topical classification runs as *إذ رأى المحرمون صيداً فضحكوا ففطن الحلال*. The incidents narrated by Bukhari in the subsequent chapters or the headings he gave to them contain the clarification of the fact that – *لا يعين المحرم الحلال في قتل الصيد* – i.e., it is not permissible for those in the state of *ihram* that they should help in the hunting of those who are not in that state. Moreover, in the title of one of the chapters it has been written clearly that – *لا يشير المحرم إلى الصيد لكي يصطاده الحلال* – i.e., it is not permissible for people in the state of *ihram* to indicate by gesture the game to *ghair-muhrim*, i.e., those not in that state although exceptions were made in the cases of laughing, guffawing and such other acts, and Abu Qatadah's report was adduced to in support of this view.<sup>24</sup> And this has also been pointed out that before partaking of the flesh of the hunted animal, the Prophet did want to clarify whether anyone among those in the state of *ihram* indicated to the prey, and from this it was deduced that the state of *ihram* was not affected if they laughed out loudly and thus drew the attention of the hunter. This kind of interpretation and stratagem to find a way out despite clear Qur'anic instruction forbidding hunting or aiding it, is not much different from the devices used by the interpreters of Talmud to justify worldly activities on the day of the Sabbath on which



under which it is permissible but also discusses the process of doing it. A further confirmation of this Qur'anic provision regarding dry ablution is available in the report attributed to Ammar. He says that once when he was traveling he became impure, and for dry ablution he rolled over on the dust. Later, when he sought corroboration of his act from the Prophet, the Prophet said that it was enough for him to run his palms over his hands and face. Ostensibly, this report seems to corroborate or interpret the verse on dry ablution, but it puts serious hurdle in the way of Qur'anic understanding when, in the latter part of the report, this statement by Ammar made after due confirmation from the Prophet, was not acceptable to Omer. In other words, history that had presented the report of Ammar as the elucidation of the verse on dry ablution blocked any means of its understanding. In *Sahih Muslim*, according to the report attributed to Abdur Rahman bin Abza, it is not only that Omer refused to accept Ammar's understanding of the issue, but Ammar himself offered not to recount the report if the caliph so wished: لا أحدث به أحدا ولم يذكر.<sup>25</sup> In some reports it is recorded that according to Abdullah bin Mas'ud there was no provision for dry ablution for people in a state of impurity, even if water was not available for a month. In some other reports one finds mention of the mutual conversation between Abdullah bin Mas'ud and Abu Musa Ashari where Ibn Mas'ud points out that Ammar's report was not acceptable to Omer. It passes understanding, however, when the Qur'an is very clear about the fact that dry ablution can be a substitute for bathing, why should Omer or Ibn Mas'ud entertain any reservations about it? Shafei tried to explain away this conflict between history and Revelation by speculating that the phrase أو لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ could mean the touch of a woman, and thus could symbolically suggest sexual intercourse. If it is so, then the entire focus of the verse would shift from people in a state of impurity to something else. It is amazing that those who are knowledgeable about the Qur'anic style and the finer nuances of the Arabic language should stray away so much in their defense of history that they had to take recourse to dubious interpretations of the Qur'anic phrase. In the words of Shah Waliullah – اِشَارَةُ الشَّافِعِيِّ إِلَى  
 ان عمرو ابن مسعود كان يحملان الملامسة على المس باليد.<sup>26</sup> The report by Ammar recorded in *Muslim* also recounts that while refusing to accept his understanding of the Qur'an Omer further stated that – نوليك ما توليت –<sup>27</sup> i.e., the responsibility of your report lies entirely with you.

Thus, the verse on dry ablution became a matter of dispute because of conflicting reports. A very clear command on the issue whether dry ablution can be a substitute for bathing fell a prey to this dispute. Moreover, the differing interpretation of the Qur'anic phrase, أو لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ by Omer and Ibn Mas'ud raised a barrier of ambiguity

for all times to come. As a matter of fact, there is no corroboration in the Qur'anic view of life for the notion that one loses purity acquired through ablution if one is touched by a woman. The question remained as to what should be the Qur'anic commandment regarding people in the state of impurity, in the face of conflicting interpretations? The variety of reports on this issue and their conflicting interpretations led to the birth of many schools of thought. Further, it was sought to accommodate all these schools of thought by bringing to the fore such reports as the following: It was said that two persons appeared before the Prophet. One said that he did not perform the prayer during his state of impurity while the other said that he performed the prayer after dry ablution. This report, recorded in *Nasaei*, recounts that the Prophet gave his approval to both the acts without any preferment.<sup>28</sup> Such stories create a false impression about the serious disagreement among the Prophet's Companions in the initial stages of Islam and the campaign of misinformation peddled by history gets further consolidated. Further, the Prophet's allegedly casual attitude towards the understanding of the Revelation certainly takes away from the absolute and definitive nature of the Qur'anic text and its understanding.<sup>29</sup>

#### HISTORY AS ABROGATOR OF THE SUNNAH

History that had acquired a sacred and definitive status through the sunnah had, by the end of the second century hijra, gained the same kind of acceptability as the 'continuous' sunnah. As a matter of fact, the evolution of the model of 'continuous' and manifest sunnah (*sunnah makshoofa mutawatera*) and that of oral and reported Sunnah (*sunnah qaoli marwiya*) took place on two different lines for two centuries in the same environment. The manifest model that the society had inherited because of the Prophet's proximity and his training, continued to be followed by generations of his followers after him. The implementation of this model was undertaken at such a massive level that no one raised any doubt about its validity nor anyone felt the need for a historical scrutiny of the prevalent sunnah. On the other hand, those who were active in searching out the oral sunnah or practices, too, desired that rather than depending wholly on historical and social practices, the Prophetic model must be preserved in all its details and positive aspects. However, towards the end of the second century hijra when the oral sunnah got extraordinary prominence and the writings of muhadditheen (*ulema-e usool*) became available to the reading public, it was accepted in principle for the first time that the oral sunnah might be used for the correction of the 'continuous' sunnah. When Imam Shafei insisted on the validity of the oral sunnah, he had the Maliki jurisprudence and the opposition of the people of Medina to

it. This suggests the possibility that the reflection of the model of the 'continuous' sunnah might have been left in the practices of the people of the earlier generation. This extraordinary insistence on the oral sunnah and its use as the abrogator was not found in the period of Imam Malik. Otherwise, there was no reason why he should have refused to accept the suggestion made by Caliph Mamun to the effect that *Muatta* should be used as the definitive source for the interpretation of the Faith. Imam Malik was aware of the fact that the oral reports of *Muatta* had reached him through a historical process, and that despite all its merits it had the status of single-transmitter traditions which though it could be used for historiography or understanding of the faith, could never interfere with 'continuous' and manifest sunnah corroborated by the uninterrupted practice of an entire generation.

As we have pointed out, since the concluding decades of the second century hijra the delicate balance between the 'manifest model' and the 'oral sunnah' could not be maintained. Shafei's treatise, *Al-Risala*, a pioneering work in methodology, left a profound impact on Islamic thinking in the later years. Once it was accepted that the oral sunnah had precedence over the practices of the people of Medina or the 'continuous' sunnah, people began to use the oral sunnah for the correction and scrutiny of the prevalent sunnah. As a matter of fact, this was a direct attack mounted by history on the sunnah through the means of sayings and practices. Thus, one can say that this extraordinary prominence gained by history through the oral sunnah shook the foundations of the manifest and 'continuous' model of the sunnah. The acts that were formerly considered consensual were rendered controversial through the interference of the oral sunnah. It went so far that serious disagreements also cropped up in matters of prayer and worship and the activities of daily life that were handed down from one generation to another. An obligatory daily prayer like *salah* performed by the Muslims five times a day since the days of the Prophet was also not spared from this controversy, and disagreements cropped up about each stage of the *salah*, from the initial declaration of the intention, the *niyyah*, to the terminal gesture of turning one's head first to the right and then to the left. This is indicative of how profound an impact the prominence of the oral sunnah which, in fact, means the prominence of history and historical accounts, had left on the 'proven' sunnah, the *sunnah mutawatirah* or the manifest model.

Those who consider history the only source of the Prophetic model could certainly say that the disagreements in the ways of the *salah* owe their origin to the confirmed sunnah, and that all the issues concerning disagreements could be traced back to the Prophet. But to say any such thing would amount to misunderstanding both history

and sunnah. It can be called a kind of oversimplification that the latter-day scholars had resorted to, in their own periods, to control the issues arising out of the conflict between history and sunnah, at a public level. However, it is not possible to accept it at the level of knowledge or history, nor can it be supported through any evidence from the Qur'anic view of life – وَكَانُوا شَيْعًا [6:159]. If there is so much disagreement between the Sunnis and the Shiites and then among different schools of the Sunnis like the Hanafites, the Shafeites, the Malikites and the Hanbalites regarding an everyday activity like the *salah*, so much so that it appears that each group is performing a different kind of prayer, and no group perhaps can now say with certainty how the Prophet himself performed his *salah* during his last days, the reasons for all this can be traced back to the extraordinary prominence of the oral sunnah. If it is the question of how the Prophet himself led the *salah* in his last days, then it must be pointed out that if Abu Bakr who had the distinction of leading the *salah* during the Prophet's lifetime, had deviated even slightly from the ways of the Prophet, then people would have certainly raised objections. After the Prophet's death if any of the four grand caliphs had deviated from the Prophet's ways, it would have been recorded in history. In the vast repertoire of sayings and practices, we find no evidence of any disagreements among the blessed caliphs about the ways of *salah* or any disagreement between the imam leading the *salah* and any of his followers (*muq'tadi*) regarding the ways in which *salah* was conducted. In the same books, though, we find mention of the public reproach of a caliph like Omer while he was standing on the pulpit. Then, what could be the reason for the disagreement between different groups of Muslims and different schools of jurisprudence on issues like the recitation of takbeer on the two Eids and the days of *tashreeq*, utterances bearing witness to the faith (*tashahhud*), saying 'bismillah' or 'amen' loudly, the number of *kalma-e iqamat*, *qirat khalf-al imam* etc.? If the source of all these activities had been the Prophet's practices, then there was no reason why some of it should not have been reflected in the practices of those who were close to him. The Prophet's mosque, which was the centre of the Islamic caliphate, would have been the right place where the Prophet's Companions would have performed their *salah* in so many different ways and all of them would have been validated as the sunnah encompassing different periods of Islamic history.

Imam Malik who, besides enjoying spatial and chronological proximity with the Prophet's Medina, also enjoys a special status among us because of his knowledge of traditions and jurisprudence, did not approve of holding both the hands, reciting *bismillah* or lifting the arms up to the earlobes. Moreover, the Malikites turn their heads only to one side at the terminal stage of the *salah* and they call the *azan* for the

Morning Prayer (*fajr*) much before dawn.<sup>30</sup> As opposed to this, in Abu Hanifa who was a contemporary of Malik but situated far away from Medina, in Kufa, we find a great difference from the practices of Imam Malik described above. However, despite his practice of different ways of worship, if Imam Malik did not like the idea that his *Muatta* should be made the source of Islamic jurisprudence the reason for which could be his feeling that the oral sunnah that had reached him through historical practices could not be allowed to abrogate the 'continuous' sunnah.

The disagreements that cropped up in the basic ways of Islamic worship because of the attack mounted on the Prophetic model by history soon took the form of an ideological crisis. The oral sunnah that had been given prominence because it was thought it would facilitate the process of historical analysis, in practice, began to interfere with the Prophetic model in the name of correcting deviations. The disagreements regarding the external ways of worship and the conflict arising out of differences in matters of jurisprudence led to a situation of grave intellectual and ideological crisis for the Muslim community. Under these critical circumstances, the jurists and preachers had no other way open to them except declaring all the prevalent practices as the sunnah and regard them as genuine expression of the Prophet's practices, so that one group did not call the other misguided. The solution devised by the scholars for the disagreements in the world of Islamic thinking was that all the differing views regarding the Prophet's practices should be regarded as the legitimate expression of the sunnah. As for the disagreements among the Islamic scholars, the conflicting views of the jurists and the self-contradictory information provided by the reports, it was decided that they should be prioritised according to their merit. The harm caused by the attack mounted on the structure of the Prophetic model by the extraordinary prominence given to the oral sunnah by Shafei and that resulted in aggravating differences in other issues as well, was sought to be repaired through an attitude of compromise towards history and the oral sunnah. The views expressed by Ahmad bin Hanbal and the jurists coming after him that all sunnah could be traced back to the Prophet are, in fact, an expression of this attitude of compromise. To support this attitude, reports like the one that states that a person who reads surah Fatiha standing behind the imam and a person who doesn't have both endorsements from the practices of the Prophet's companions.<sup>31</sup> These kinds of reports that have been devised to absorb the shock dealt by the ideological crisis were outwardly successful in their objective. The tendency to take a particular version of history as the Faith or its definitive expression lessened. People displayed some breadth of vision to accommodate differences about history. However, this attitude of pragmatism and

compromise regarding the Prophetic model left a deep impact on the concept of sunnah in the later ages. Extending the implications of the sunnah so that it encompassed the practices of the Prophet's Companions was not an act in consonance with the concept that the Qur'an projects of the Prophetic model and which is to be imitated by Muslims under any circumstances. Secondly, historically speaking, it is simply in the realm of speculation that there was ever any kind of disagreement among the Prophet's Companions concerning a *mutawatir* or constantly repeated sunnah like *salah*.

When once history is accorded credence then it does not remain possible to negate it simply on the basis of historical evidence. After declaring the oral sunnah the source of the Faith and after regarding it as the sayings of the Prophet, there was no way open to the scholars except declaring that the different and conflicting reports were simultaneously valid. This situation compelled the ulema to take the kind of position that is evident from the following statement by Laith bin Sa'd: 'When something is considered to be permissible or impermissible by the scholars or the jurists, it should not be construed by those regarding the thing as impermissible that their rival group (i.e., those who regard it as permissible) has gone astray; similarly those who regard the thing as permissible should not feel that the other group has gone outside the pale.<sup>32</sup> Jassas who was credited with fresh interpretation of the faith (*mujtahid al-madhab*) and who had renowned scholars as his admirers, devised a way out of the controversy created by the single-transmitter traditions and it was – Muslims can follow whatever path they liked as all reports, in some way or another, could be traced back to the Prophet. As for the disagreement among the Islamic scholars, Jassas opined that it was not because of the sunnah but should be regarded as emanating from the endeavor by the scholars to identify the sunnah of superior merit. Further, according to Jassas, about the things over which Muslims have been given this kind of right, it was not obligatory on the Prophet to inform his followers which was superior and which was not. ليس على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم توقيفهم على الافضل مما خيروهم فيه.<sup>33</sup> This kind of self-styled stratagem, i.e., the quest for the best or the superior among the sunnah might have provided temporary relief from the difficulties created by history, but it created a certain ambiguity about the very purpose of apostleship, and the scholars got a certain license to interpret the Faith on the pretext of 'the quest for perfection' in emulating the Prophet.

Those who, even in the Prophetic Model, prefer one model over the other, or consider themselves qualified to judge which among the sunnah are superior and which are not, and who only have history as their primary support in this quest, will



certainly find all the doors closed on them. The fact is – the strategies adopted by them and their own misconceptions about history made them prisoners of history. Now, it is very difficult, even impossible for them to identify the correct prototype of the sunnah and know who among the imams and the mujtahids, seriously disagreeing with one another on contentious issues, are in the right. Are all of them in the right, or is there any particular one? It is only through the unique distinction of the Revelation that a system of thought built on it enjoys primacy and revolves around the paradigm and worldview projected by it. As it is said in the Qur'an – *وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ إِخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا* [4:82]. When religious thought distances itself from the Revelation and wanders in the realms of history, then it is natural that there would crop up disagreements and different versions of truth. We cannot get rid of this confusion and turmoil in the world of religious thinking as long as we have not been able to rid ourselves of the stranglehold of history. The answer to the question as to why the crisis engendered by this conflict between history and the sunnah could not yet be resolved lies in our total dependence on the Predecessors, their methodology of *tatbeeq* and their understanding of the Shariah. The compromising stipulation that all are in the right and that all the reports, in some stage or another, may have been the legitimate expression of the sunnah, can be a temporary strategy in a period of crisis. However, to say that this concept of the sunnah is a truth in itself and all the differing views regarding history and 'discrimination' are equally valid, and to strengthen this argument by asserting that our earlier scholars such as Abul Hasan Ash'ari, Qadi Abu Bakr Baqilani, Abu Yusuf, Muhammad bin Hasan and Qadi Shuraih<sup>34</sup> support this view, would amount to giving a secondary place to the Revelation in our system of thought, and, despite all our efforts, we would remain prisoners of history and the conventional Muslim thinking engendered by it.

The harm caused by the misconceptions about history cannot be repaired through a recourse to the views of the Predecessors who were themselves victims of this intellectual aberration, nor is there strength enough in the methods of historical analysis and elucidation to make it possible for the emergence of a method of historical scrutiny that would ensure correction and validation of history. But for history to do so would amount to negating its very existence, particularly in a situation where the hold of such traditions, whose very existence prevents any scrutiny of history, on the authenticated history is so strong. The tradition related to the issue of *mislahu ma'ahu* about which we have discussed in the earlier pages, forewarns us against an alarming future when, according to this tradition, well-fed individual, seated in his throne, would say: 'O my people! Following the Qur'an is obligatory for you. So, do whatever has

been declared permissible for you and avoid whatever has been declared impermissible.<sup>35</sup> According to this tradition, such a stance is not right. To consolidate its own position as the authenticated account and to keep it above any historical principle or scrutiny, history not only contented itself by bringing to the fore such reports, but also, in its effort to provide justification for the existence of sunnah outside the Qur'an, attributed dubious reports to Omer such as the following one: سيكون من بعدكم قوما يكذبون بالرجم وبالذجال وبالشفاعة وبعبذاب القبر ويقوم يخرجون من النار بعد ما امتحشوا.<sup>36</sup> Whether it is a question of the laws of stoning to death or the appearance of the anti-Christ, the concept of reward or punishment in the grave, the fact remains that the pages of the Qur'an are devoid of any reference to such things. This kind of historical account not only strengthened the belief that there were religious beliefs outside the Qur'an or the stance of the availability of *wahi ghair matlu*. Their impact could also be seen on the Successors who gradually stopped to look at history as history, and lost the inclination to evaluate the sayings and practices in the crucible of historical principles. It would appear that history has pre-empted the potential critics even before they could find fault with it, and it is quite probable that some people, impatient with this tyranny of history, might have been compelled to deny it altogether. One can find evidence of this in the attitudes of the followers of the Prophet's Companions and their followers, in turn, in the early phase of Islam,<sup>37</sup> or, an extreme form of which can be seen in some of those who call themselves *ahl-e Qur'an*. However, despite this constricting tyranny of history, there is almost no possibility of its correction from within. History does not have the courage for self-criticism, that is why it would reject reports such as – تكثر لكم الأحاديث بعدى فما روى لكم حديث عنى فأعرضوه على كتاب الله فما وافقه فاقبلوه وما خالفه فردوه – saying that it was fabricated by the Schematics (Khawarij) and heretics;<sup>38</sup> further, it would try to make people believe that the traditionists and exegetes were so unnerved on hearing such reports that they declared them (the reports) anti-Qur'anic. These facts are enough to show that there is no possibility of History's correction or reform from within.

### RECLAIMING THE SUNNAH

History is supposed to contain insights into people's culture and their collective life in the society. In discharging the responsibility of disseminating the saying and practices sometimes its insights get dimmed, sometimes they are in bright colours, sometimes they are transparent and sometimes they look very tiny, like objects seen from a distance. In the historical journey of humankind it is quite natural that a community would be influenced by the concept of history and the worldview found in

the other communities. In such circumstances, for reclaiming the sunnah it will be necessary that we liberate it from history. As long as the sunnah cannot be liberated from history, it will not be possible to delineate the Prophetic model in all its dimensions. We will elaborate on this process later. Briefly, it can be said that all this pertains to a situation where history becomes not an interpreter but a supporter of the Revelation, and that we are able to save ourselves totally from assumptions and absolutism in our study of history. To say that consensus has already been reached in the Muslim community on the authenticity of the six books of traditions, and that among the conflicting manifestations of the sunnah all of them should be taken as the genuine expression of the sunnah just because our Predecessors and earlier scholars held that view are, in fact, opens invitations to the study of history in the light of edicts. This, indeed, gives one the impression that the door to the understanding of history was closed even before it was opened.<sup>39</sup> No initiative was taken to implement a sacred and timeless entity like the Revelation and draw people to it on the authority of elders. The non-believing members of the Quraish tribe ran a propaganda campaign against the Prophet alleging him of being a practitioner of black magic who mesmerised people with his Qur'anic verses. Such allegations were countered by nothing else but by the might of the Revelation itself. The Revelation itself encourages people time and again to think, to reflect and to observe the universe and thus to arrive at correct and logical conclusions. When a sacred entity like the Revelation does not favour making acolytes under duress, either because of the tyranny of people's opinions or on the strength of edicts, then how far is it proper to insist that for history that contains human insight and the volumes of sayings and practices compiled by human beings should be regarded as *wahi ghair matlu*? The fact is – as long as the sunnah has not been fully liberated from history, its definitive and imitable nature will remain suspect. And the question will still keep haunting us that if the volumes of the six books of traditions are really the immortal source of *wahi ghair matlu*, then why have many of the sunnah among them, e.g., the use of *khimrah salah*, the prayer tablets or the practise of *mut'a*, the temporary marriage, been dismissed by the jurists of the ahl-e-sunnah school?

In the 'Introduction' to his *Sahih* Imam Muslim has written that sometimes falsehood does come out of the mouth of even goodly people, and that their tongue may utter falsehood though their intentions are pure. We should not ignore the fact that as far as the vast repertoire of sayings and practices is concerned, we have to deal with what was uttered by the tongue rather than what was in the mind. For reclaiming the Prophetic model we must go beyond the errors of the tongue and reach the good

intentions of the well-meaning reporters. This is not possible unless we are able to confine history within its limits. As a matter of fact, to escape the linguistic slippage committed by the well-meaning reporters and reclaim their good intentions and purity of the heart are acts that can offer correctives to our distorted notions of history. The opposite of this: to ignore the distorted notions of history projected by these reporters, or to take their critique of history as the last word on the subject, or to say that whatever is recorded in the books of sayings and practices are all true, or to designate the conflicting and contradictory accounts of history as multiple forms and shades of the sunnah, in fact, amounts to conniving with history. It does not matter whether it is done with the impulse of authenticating history or under the impact of the Predecessors. We cannot ignore this reality: that we ourselves have conferred on history the authenticating authority first through sayings and practices, then the sunnah and then through *wahi ghair matlu*. This is a creation of history, not of the Revelation. A long historical process is involved in conferring on *sehah sitta* the status of *wahi ghair matlu*. The historical principles, critical parameters and the process of textual analysis and harmonization (*jirh wa ta'deel*) on which it was given the status of the source of the sunnah instead of history, are all creations of human heart and intellect. When the tyranny of history begins to interfere with the understanding of the Revelation, and when it is felt that either through history or on the pretext of providing the background and the context, it has erected a strong barrier around the Revelation, then there is no reason why we should not undertake a review of the principles devised by ourselves. Of course, to critically review a history that has already been accorded a sacred status through the sunnah, is not easy task. Unless we are aware of the historical process through which we have conferred a sacred status to history, we would not be able to deconstruct the methods and principles to which we have become prisoners.

We should not also overlook the fact that the compilations of traditions have by now acquired an established status of the timeless source of *wahi ghair matlu*, and according to scholars, those who refuse to accept them as the immortal source of the utterances of the Prophet could be declared as mistaken, heretics, even unbelievers. Not to speak of the status of these compilations as the source of *wahi ghair matlu*, the actual fact is they could not establish their status even as elucidatory or interpretive sources in the period when they were published. If the Schismatics (*khawarij*) refused to accept the reports pertaining to the blessedness of the Prophet's family (*ahl-e bait*) and considered it a means of promoting groupism, the Shiites openly rejected *Hadith-e-manaqib* i.e. the traditions attributed to the Prophet praising his Companions. In the

later ages when, under the impact of Greek thought, the Mu'tazila way of thinking entered the Islamic thought, their denial of the traditions pertaining to *sifaat*, the attributes of God, created an uproar in the interpretive world of Islam. There is no doubt about the fact that each group wanted to convince others that the reports it favored were the only reliable reports, and considered it legitimate to deploy traditions to consolidate its stance. But the different political, juristic or sectarian groups never reflected on the fact that because of the controversial nature of their own sayings and practices, those who refused to accept the reports presented by them would be placed outside the pale of Islam.

Later, when principles began to be formulated on the scrutiny of reports and the refutation and correction of the reporters, and when different parameters of report based on internal merit (*riwayat wa darayat*) were adopted to discriminate between the genuine and fabricated traditions, and various traditionists began to compile their collections on the basis of these principles, they could not have thought in their wildest imagination that those who would refuse to accept their compilations as unreliable would be accused of denying the sunnah. If anyone pointed to any inadequacies in the reports, or judged them weak or unreliable, it was thought that he had totally rejected the reporters. The traditionists and their disciples were fully aware of the fact that the scrutiny or correction of reports required historical foresight that could never create the impression of absolute certainty or definitiveness. All the principles of evaluating the traditions were the creation of the human intellect that reflected the traditionists' individual notion of history. One may resort to all sorts of verification for establishing the veracity of the reporters, but can never reach the point of absolute certainty. There was hardly any other option for the traditionists except depending on the external evidence of history in establishing the veracity of the reporters. The problem was – the reporter judged reliable by one person was considered suspect by another. This resulted in serious disagreement among the traditionists themselves on the veracity or otherwise of the reporters. Under these circumstances, it was natural that disagreements should crop up about the genuineness of traditions. The Hadith that was considered reliable by one traditionist was considered unreliable by another. As this disagreement was engendered by their own individual understanding of history, they did not expect that others would accept their views without demur. This is the reason why if one group of scholars showed its preference for a particular compilation of Hadith, other groups indicated their preference for other compilations.

To assert this about any compilation of the traditions of the Prophet that there cannot be any further refutation or correction of the Hadith contained in it is a notion

that is not endorsed even by the history of the principles according to which they have been compiled. There were different compilations of the traditions. It should be noted that the compilers of *Sehah Sitta* in the third century hijra, despite their contemporaneity remained preoccupied with their own individual compilations. This was due to the reason that the principles of testing the traditions and the method of scrutiny considered reliable by one scholar was not considered so by another. For instance, Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik used to consider it acceptable to base their arguments on *marasil*, i.e., tradition with broken chain, but Imam Shafei expressed his reservations about it and considered such Hadith to be feeble in the light of written documents. Later on, this judgment of Shafei was given considerable importance in the principles of testing of the traditions, judging the Hadith through correspondence no longer remained reliable in the eyes of the scholars of traditions. Although in terms of chronological proximity, Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifa have precedence in the scholarship of Hadith and jurisprudence, respectively, Shafei criticism of their works made their stances suspect in the eyes of the succeeding generations. Similarly, according to Imam Malik, the practices of the people of Medina can by themselves serve as the proofs of the sunnah because, according to him, it was an environment nurtured by the Prophet himself, and that grew under his direct supervision. Thus, each one of the practices may be said to have enjoyed his approval and support. However, the scholars in the later years refused to accept this argument of Imam Malik.<sup>40</sup>

There is also disagreement among the scholars of tradition regarding the definition of a *sahih* (authentic) Hadith. If Imam Muslim considers the possibility of the meeting between the reporter and the reported enough for the validation of a Hadith without establishing in historical terms whether the meeting actually took place, Imam Bukhari considers the actual physical meeting between them, at least once, to be a necessary condition for validation. If some consider the reports by the heretics to be unreliable, others opine that it is not proper to make one's faith or adherence to a particular school the basis for accepting the report. It is probably due to this reason that, despite the difference in the ways of belief, some traditionists have incorporated the reports by the Shiite and Schismatic (*khawarij*) reporters in their books.

As we have pointed out in the beginning, the justification for the multiple compilations of traditions was the disagreement among the traditionists about the principles of the testing of Hadith. Then those who are conversant with the history of the evolution of Hadith literature would easily appreciate the gradual evolution of the Hadith with the passage of time. The nature of human knowledge is that it is an on-

going continuum and it gets better and better with the passage of time. In no stage of this journey can it be declared that it has reached its destination, or that as a result of the long historical journey spread over several centuries the different volumes of sayings and practices that have been compiled on the principles devised by the human intellect, are now totally devoid of any errors or blemishes that might have crept in during the process of research and scrutiny. Or that in the human accounts that have the status of 'report in meaning' (*rawayat bil-ma'ni*) have preserved the quotidian of the Prophet in all its dimensions. This is also due to the fact that the principles of testing that we take to be the hallmark of the profound knowledge of the traditionists were not considered worthy of such merit by other contemporary traditionists. If the method of scrutiny of the traditions adopted by Malik and Abu Hanifa can be rejected by Shafei and the Islamic scholars after him through the process of textual and contextual evaluation (*jarah wa ta'deel*), if Bukhari's parameters of validation can be discarded in the light of the arguments put forward by his own student, Imam Muslim and other traditionists, if the principles of scrutiny adopted by contemporary traditionists can differ from one another, then there is no reason why today, after the passage of eleven or twelve centuries, a review of our cultural and intellectual heritage as undertaken by Shafei, Bukhari or Muslim in the past, should be considered sinful. If the scholars of traditions do not consider a healthy and critical evaluation of the judgments by Imam Malik, despite his chronological and spatial proximity to the Prophet's Medina, to be a denial of the sunnah, if Imam Malik's concept of the sunnah, i.e., the practices of the inhabitants of Medina, could be judged unreliable in the past in the light of the arguments put forward by the experts, then there is no reason why today we should lose the courage to undertake such an evaluation. It is not only necessary but desirable also because, despite our greater distance from the period of the Prophet than that of either Bukhari or Muslim, we now have greater resources of research and scrutiny at our disposal.

Among the leaders of the traditionists there was disagreement not only on the principles of Hadith but on the reporters' understanding of the history as well. In other words, history was influencing the utterances of the Prophet not only in matters of words and interpretation but also in matters concerning reporters too. Some traditionists had set the condition of the ability of discrimination (*tafaqqah*) for the reporters, while the concept of history held by others was a reflection of the Hadith where it was recorded: 'Keep on reporting; it might be that the listeners are equipped with much better understanding than the listeners. Because of the disagreement among the traditionists regarding reporters, the compilations of Hadith never gained universal

and unqualified approval. It is said that Imam Muslim used six hundred and fifteen such reporters whom Bukhari did not consider worthwhile to use. Likewise, Bukhari has used four hundred thirty four such reporters whom Imam Muslim did not think reliable enough. This is the reason why there are many Hadiths which, according to Muslim, fulfill the condition of being rated as genuine, but do not find favor with Bukhari who feel that they should not be incorporated in the genuine compilations of Hadith.<sup>41</sup> This was the disagreement on the criteria and the reliability of the transmitter between these two renowned traditionists who were not only contemporary and their sources were the same, but they were teacher and student as well. Then the reliability of those reporters whom the traditionists had declared reliable was also limited to specific contexts. That is why the parameters of reliability were different from traditionist to traditionist. If an individual was considered reliable, it was not necessary that he would be reliable in all cases. For example, Hitham bin Bashir Wasti who is said to be a disciple of Zahri, was among the reporters of Bukhari. Zahri himself can also be seen in Bukhari's narrations from time to time. However, despite the reliability of these two reporters, Bukhari does not elicit any report regarding Zuhair from Hitham.<sup>42</sup> These changing perceptions about the reporters have cast a shadow of doubt on the reliability of reports leading to disagreements among the traditionists. This is one of the reasons for the serious disagreement that is found among the traditionists regarding the classification of Hadith. Some people can regard such changing perceptions about the reporters to be an attitude of caution. But it cannot be said that as a consequence of this seeming attitude of caution, there is total confidence among scholars about the reporters used by Bukhari or Muslim.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, these differences found among the compilers of the *sehad* perpetuated both during their lifetimes as well as afterwards. According to Abu Umar of Damascus, Bukhari uses the reports of individuals such as Akramah, Ismail, Asim, Amr bin Farazdaq etc., whose evidence has been refuted by the Predecessors and researchers. Similarly, scholars have objected to Imam Muslim for using the evidence by Sawaid bin Sa'id. Imam Darqutni asserts that as many as two hundred and ten Hadith recorded by the compilers of *Sehad* are feeble, out of which eighty can be found in *Bukhari* alone, thirty in *Muslim*, and one hundred that are common in both. This is the judgment of traditionists about two of the most genuine compilations of Hadith. That leaves the remaining four among the six compilations of *Sehad* which, even by the parameters set by the traditionists themselves, are the compilations where all the traditions recorded cannot be claimed to be absolutely genuine. Among them, *Abu Dawood*, *Tirmizi* and *Nasai* contain a large number of *hasan* and feeble traditions, and *Ibn*



*Maja* contains all kinds of traditions like *hasan*, *saleh*, *munkar*. The traditionists themselves opine that it is wrong to consider these six compilations as *the* genuine compilations of traditions.

The principles of testing on which compilations of traditions have been declared to be the *sehad* were devised by men. They cannot be said to have emanated from Allah. Thus the sanctity of terms such as *sehad sitta* will always remain under scrutiny.<sup>44</sup> Those who insist on declaring *Sehad Sitta* to be authentic and beyond the processes of scrutiny and evaluation, in fact, want to stop the evolution of history. It is said that when Hafiz Ibn Salah had preached this view widely that after the compilation of the *sehad*, no one should be given the right to undertake the scrutiny of traditions and that the compilations that have reached us in the forms of *sehad sitta* should be declared the last word on the subject for all times to come, the scholars did not approve of this idea. Darqutni made a review of the *sehad sitta*, and so did Hakim whose efforts were directed on similar lines. The Predecessors themselves undertook the criticism and reassessment of the work done by the scholars who came before them. This led to the establishment of a healthy tradition that the works done by the leading Predecessors could not pass muster even by the standard set by themselves. The canonization of the *Sehad Sitta* would amount to a negation of the concept of history according to which they came into existence in the first place. If Bukhari and Muslim can have the right to raise questions about the understanding of the traditionists who were the followers of the Prophet's Companions, and to undertake the re-evaluation and re-assessment of the reports narrated by them, and then declare some Hadith to be right and some to be wrong, then there is no reason why the scholars of a later generation should be deprived of this right.

How history can deny its own account according to which there were more reliable compilations of the Prophetic traditions before the *sehad sitta*, put together by such renowned people such as Abdullah bin Mas'ud, Abdullah bin Umar, Jubair, Abu Hurairah, Anas bin Malik, Abdullah bin Abbas and Samrah bin Khabeer. These are among the better-known compilations. Apart from these, there is the compilation attributed to Abdullah bin Umar, which is said to have been put together by his disciple, Nafi', and the compilation by Samrah bin Jubair which is attributed to his son, Sulaiman bin Samrah. References to these compilations are available in the books of history. History also tells us that these compilations, consisting of the reports by the Prophet's Companions, have now been preserved in the books of reports after proper validation. First, it is a matter of surprise that if these compilations were really available, then why none of them could reach us in any form?<sup>45</sup> Then it is a matter of

even greater surprise that people should accept their alienation from the rather more reliable compilations put together during the age of the Prophet's Companions, that there should be no effort to preserve them as the source of the sunnah, and that the compilations put together by the people later should be accorded the status of the eternal source of the sunnah. If the compilations of the traditions were indeed put together by the Prophet's Companions or their followers, then should they be required to be validated and compiled again? If one regards this account of history as true, it would render the compilation of *sehad sitta* to be a futile act. Both in terms of knowledge and history, such re-enactment of compilation would appear to be perverse.

One cannot ignore the fact that in investing history with the reliability of the sunnah, besides historical principles and the researches and scrutiny of *rijal*, recourse was also taken to the unhistorical and unreliable parameters of consensus and fame (*shuhrat*). If the single-transmitter traditions that were not given much credence till yesterday are considered a source of faith today simply because in their historical journey they have gained the consensus of the scholars or have proved themselves to be 'beneficial' (*mustafidh*), it would give the impression of a non-revealed faith whose foundations are laid not on the Revelation but on the individual judgment of the ulema and the gradual evolution of the historical consciousness. The prevalence of the famed word 'Hadith' in place of the earlier two categories single-reporter transmission (*ahad*) and 'uninterrupted' (*mutawatir*) transmission, and then the assertion of the scholars that the traditions that had acquired a wide reputation in the periods of the followers of the Prophet's Companions and their followers would be considered reliable whereas the traditions that gained popularity after them would not be considered so<sup>46</sup>, all these have an uncanny affinity with the concept of history held by the Israelites where the first three generations were given the foundational status in their Shariah. This sacred status for the first three generations, however, cannot be corroborated from the Qur'anic view of life. The principles of the faith had reached completion in the lifetime of the Prophet. Despite the presence of the clear Qur'anic message – *الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ* – how can the Faith be left to be decided by the consensus of those who were to come on the horizon later? In the process of the traditions gaining fame and acceptability and the status of being 'beneficial', if the understanding of the elderly Prophet's Companions takes a back seat, as admitted by some traditionists, how reliable can this fame or consensus accorded by the successors be? As Shah Waliullah has pointed out regarding the provision of dry ablution for persons in the impure state mentioned in the *sehad*, that this tradition was not acceptable to Omer. However, it turned out to be so 'convenient' (*mustafidh*) in the later ages that people began to have less reservations

about it.<sup>47</sup> Some traditionists also held the view that the wide acceptability and practice by the Ummah contribute to the credibility of a Hadith and slowly it reaches the status of certainty. The role of these historical and sociological factors cannot be ignored in the process of the canonization of traditions.

In according *Hadith* a position beyond history, our scholars had often deviated from the historical principles on which, at one point of time, the decisions about the methodology of textual and contextual evaluation (*jirh wa ta'deel*) were taken, as a consequence of which it was possible to place history on a sacred pedestal. In the validation of Hadith, ignoring both the *dirayat* and the *riwayat* – the rationale of the report and the authenticity of the reporter and giving precedence to consensus and 'fame' have resulted in the accumulation of a large number of irrational Hadith that have become a part of our religious heritage. And this has happened despite the caution exercised by our scholars regarding some famed but true single-reporter transmissions.<sup>48</sup> For example, the traditions related to stoning to death, or about the dajjal, or about the Prophet's supposed consumption of honey or the report that claims that the Prophet was affected by black magic or the prevalent belief that the Prophet was *ummi* in the sense of 'illiterate', are considered among the traditions which are, in fact, single-reporter transmissions but have now gained 'fame' – the first two claiming to have been reported by caliph Omer and the last three through Bukhari and Muslim – and they are no longer a subject of dispute in the Ummah. Actually, all these reports run counter to the Qur'anic view of life. The Hadith relating to black magic, though present in the *sehad* has been strongly contradicted by Abu Bakr Jassas.<sup>49</sup> The Hadith claiming the Prophet to be *ummi* in the sense of 'illiterate', merely because of its insertion by Bukhari and its wide acceptability in the Ummah, cannot be considered authentic.<sup>50</sup> In its historical journey, if any report gained acceptability because of our mistaken thinking, it cannot be part of the Faith merely on the basis of consensus or fame. To say in support of consensus and fame that لا تجتمع أمي على الضلالة amounts to an attempt to understand history on unhistorical bases, or at the most, it can be said the evidence of history on history. To give credence to such an attitude would mean that we should surrender our rights to analyze or critique history.

### A NEW PERSPECTIVE FOR THE STUDY OF SUNNAH

Whether it is the *sehad* or other books of Hadith, even the traditionists themselves do not assert that all the Hadith incorporated therein necessarily and beyond doubt consist of the Prophet's sayings in verbatim. It cannot be claimed that there is no possibility of error in the way the reporters have tried to preserve the quotidian of the

Prophet, nor can it be claimed that the cumulative knowledge coming from all the known compilations of traditions provides an exhaustive and authentic record of the sunnah. As long as it is not possible to preserve in toto the quotidian of the Prophet in all its dimensions spanning over 23 years, the hunch that many sayings and practices of the Prophet may have either escaped the memory of the reporters and that many more important may not have found place in their compilation because they did not find them suitable according to the parameters of testing, will remain problematic. It is said that in the compilation of *Sahih Bukhari*, Imam Bukhari selected only seven thousand (and if one does not include repetitions, the number comes down to some four thousand) Hadith out of nearly six hundred thousands. Similarly, it is said about Imam Ahmad that he compiled his *Musnad* out of three hundred thousand Hadith. *Sahih Muslim* is also said to have been compiled out of three hundred thousand Hadith. In other words, those individuals who we consider to be the specialists in the field in matters of Hadiths and their memorization, exercised such care and caution that they persuaded themselves to reject hundred thousands of Hadith as they were not considered to have fulfilled the rigorous conditions of testing. We have also pointed to the fact some collections of Hadith compiled by Bukhari that were believed to have incorporated one hundred thousand Hadith are no longer available. Similarly, many other compilations of that period are hardly available now.

These things are clear indicators to the fact that in the first place, it was neither possible nor attempted to preserve the exhaustive record of the quotidian of the Prophet spanning over 23 years. Second, only a few among the notable compilations that came into being because of the efforts of the traditionists from time to time have reached us. The current position is that apart from the largest compilation of Hadith, *Musnad Imam Ahmad*, where almost all kinds of Hadith have been included, all other compilations of the sunnah, taken together, do not amount to more than fifty thousand. Some people may say that the massive number of Hadith, running into hundred thousands, from which traditionists made their compilations were there because of overlapping repetitions. In either case, one cannot obviate the possibility that these compilations of the sayings and practices of the Prophet, incorporated in fifty thousand Hadith, can not provide an exhaustive or complete picture of the Prophet's period.<sup>51</sup> Then, some of the compilations of the Prophet's quotidian purported to have been made by the same group of famed traditionists have been lost in their historical journey and could not reach us. Some people may say that the newer compilations drew on the materials contained on the older ones, as was the custom at that time, and that all the important Hadith included in the compilations of the first

and the second century hijra were incorporated in the compilation done in the third century hijra Had it been true then today *Muatta Imam Malik* would not have been known to us for its special features. Thus, there is no other way open to us except admitting the fact that these valuable books pertaining to the traditions and practices of the Prophet constitute a commendable effort to preserve the history of a sacred period and that is all. Deviating from the usual norms of history, the leading traditionists established such a rigorous standard of historical research and scrutiny in matters of the testing of the sayings and practices of the Prophet that was unknown in the world of historiography, and that could not be sustained in the later ages. But despite such rigors and caution, historiography had its own limitations, especially when the issues pertained to a period when the grandeur of the Revelation and its recipient was exercising a decisive impact on history. Under such circumstances which sort of history can pretend to record the moments that were so charged with possibilities?

The sunnah as it came to include the history of the Prophet's time as well is a later development. Today, when we use the term 'the Book and the sunnah', the word sunnah immediately reminds us of the *sehab sitta*, and we, without any reservation, consider it necessary to approach these compilations in our search for the sunnah. But just think for a while about the time when we were not familiar with the notion of *sehab sitta*, or when they had not been there. What books did the Muslims of the first and the second century hijra access in their quest for Hadith? Which sources did they go to when no compilation of the Hadith had acquired the status of being genuine, and no consensus had been arrived at regarding any particular compilation? Now, come a little closer to the Madina of the Prophet when the blessed caliphs exhorted scholars to avoid excessive reporting of Hadith, when recording the words of the Prophet or compiling them was considered to be a great menace like the *Mishnah*, when the leading among the Prophet's Companions considered it in the interest of the Faith to keep Muslims focused on the Qur'an and discourage them from placing too much emphasis to the Prophet's not so known sayings and practices, at that time what compilations or scholars of Hadith did the people approach in their quest for the sunnah? The social environment in the age of the Prophet's Companions was governed directly under the Prophet's own supervision, every element in that society bore the imprint of the Prophet's legacy, the society was not only practicing the sunnah in real life, but also considered it necessary to declare *hasabona kitab Allah*, to sustain the society's journey on the right path. The Qur'an which is the most perfect expression of the Revelation and on whose authenticity there is not the slightest shadow of doubt, had not only created a history in the Medina of the Prophet's period,

but it was also the most authentic document of that new revolution. The Qur'an tells the believers, through the Prophet, how to organize their lives on a new plane. And a direct account of the way this new life was unfolding itself was available in it. In other words, if the Qur'an was, on the one hand, a historic Book, on the other hand, it was the most authentic record of that history as well. If the Prophet was the ideal model for the Muslims, the different facets of this model were articulated through the Revelation. Those who were proximate with the period of the Prophet and felt that the Prophet had adopted the Divine commandments in his life in such a way that the Qur'an became the most authentic account of his beliefs and practices, why should they ever be tempted, in their quest for the Prophetic model and the sunnah, to stray away from this definitive source of the Revelation to history and hearsay?

The truth is – the real status of Hadith, reports and the practices of the Prophet is yet to be determined. They cannot be given the status of an alternative source, absolutely independent of the Qur'an, because to do so would amount to raising questions about the definitive status of *wahi ghair matlu*, nor can it be totally dismissed by branding it as a non-Arab conspiracy. Both these attitudes represent two extreme points of view.

It has to be understood first of all that those who, by looking at the overwhelming number of the non-Arab scholars among the compilers of the Hadith, try to argue that the majority of the scholars and traditionists, particularly all the compilers of the *sehad sitta*, are non-Arabs, and that, in opposition to the Qur'an, these scholars have edited and made available to people such compilations of the Prophetic traditions based on reports as have gradually led them away from the Qur'an, or, at least, the understanding of the Qur'an has become dependent upon the compilations of the Prophetic traditions. The people holding such views go so far as to declare the *sehad sitta* to be a non-Arab conspiracy against the Qur'an. We feel that this conspiracy theory partly owes its origin to some misconceptions about history and partly to an attempt to oversimplify this complex phenomenon. Those who are adept at finding external and internal conspiracies in the decline of Muslims, tend to ignore the fact that conspiracies, whether they are hatched externally or internally, cannot have any impact as long as they do not find any fertile ground or conducive atmosphere amidst us. And this conducive atmosphere that aids history to progress in its appointed course is, in fact, an external manifestation of our complex mental processes. By designating it as a conspiracy we might try to shift our responsibility to others, but it would not help us to properly assess our critical situation and devise an effective strategy to redress it.

There is no doubt that all the compilers of the *sehab sitta* were from non-Arab descent and this task of compiling the Hadith was being carried out in the third century hijra, far away from the Prophet's Medina and the specific ethos and environment of the time. There is also no dispute about the fact that in the context of the collection of Hadith in the beginning of the second century hijra a noted personality like Shahab Zahri who is considered to be the founder of this art and no notable books relating to the sayings and practices of the Prophet are devoid of references to him, was not directly related to the environs of Medina but was a member of the Zahra tribe and was thus associated with a non-Arab culture. From this perspective, this assertion is certainly true that the compilations of the sayings and practices of the Prophet, designated as *wahi ghair matlu* by jurists, have really been the product of the efforts undertaken by non-Arab scholars. And it cannot be denied that the non-Arab minds and intellects were actively engaged in this task. However, if we make an attempt to understand these efforts of the scholars and traditionists in their historical perspective and can place them in the Islamic cultural environs of the time, we can very easily grasp the reasons behind the assumptions of a non-Arab conspiracy. First of all, it is only natural that the attitude of the scholars brought up in non-Arab cultures would differ from the Arab ones and their prose styles would also differ. There are countless details of culture that are inalienable parts of an individual brought up in that culture. The Arab scholars may not have been self-conscious about many such cultural points and their significance, while the non-Arab scholars were not only extremely conscious of these but also that the non-Arab intellects and the paradigms of thought existing in non-Arab cultures could have adopted a more sensitive and cautious approach for the preservation of those cultural points. The second thing that has almost been robbed of us because of our servile attitude to historiography is that when the leading traditionists were engaged in these compilations of the Hadith they were aware of the greatness of the task before them, but they could not conceive it in their wildest imagination that in the coming years these compilations would acquire a sacred status. Or that they would be regarded as the immortal and the most authentic expression of an alternative form of the Revelation.

Bukhari holds a special place in the history of the evolution of Hadith literature. In fact, the insight, rigor and the high standard of analysis and scrutiny of history and the editorial competence demonstrated by him constituted a unique effort in the annals of Hadith literature, not attempted before him. A book that would provide guidance in all spheres of life through the utterances and practices of the Prophet and where discussions on every topic began with verses from the Qur'an that serve as the

reference point – all these made the treatise an extraordinary example of human endeavor. Then, Bukhari did not content himself simply with compiling a reference book but applied, to the best of his knowledge, the highest standard of research by using all possible means available at the time. From this perspective, rather than an alternative source of the Revelation, the compiling and editing of *Sahih Bukhari* constituted the making of a reference book that would provide guidance to people through organizing materials under different headings pertaining to the activities of life. Under every topic, first of all, the relevant verses from the Qur'an were given, and then the most authentic of the Prophetic traditions and practices pertaining to that topic were properly organized, to give the book the shape of an encyclopedia where the Revelation and the arguments culled from the traditions were put side by side for ready reference and the convenience of students and lay readers. Bukhari was largely successful in his purpose. *Al Jami' Al Sahih* was the most ambitious project of his life which, according to biographers, preoccupied him for fifteen long years. Despite this long period of research and investigation, the fact remains that many topics on which he had thought of gathering and organizing materials have remained blank. This encyclopedic project on jurisprudence remained incomplete. In a way, it was indicative of the fact that in the coming years, scholars and researchers would compile books on similar lines for the guidance of the people of which Bukhari's book was an initial blueprint. And, in practice, it happened exactly like this. Bukhari's most talented student, Imam Muslim went a step further than his teacher and put together a second compilation which is now known as *Sahih Muslim*. Beside Muslim (the compiler of *Sahih Muslim*), his two other students, Tirmizi and Nasei also compiled their own individual collections that are also counted among the *sehad sitta*. It is another matter that the rigorous standard of research and scrutiny established by Bukhari could not be sustained by his successors, even though their compilations have merits of their own. Today, the fame of the set of books known as *sehad sitta* rests, basically, on their merits in the process of compilation and editing. Otherwise, in terms of authenticity, these six collections have no claim to have emanated from Allah, and even the traditionists, apart from *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, have never really accorded the status of absolute authenticity (*sahih*) to the compilations put together by Tirmizi, Nasei, Ibn Maja and Abu Dawood. More pertinently, the term *sehad sitta* is used rather loosely by Islamic scholars. Some even include Muatta and Darmi in it while others insist on the inclusion of some other famous collections. Those in their excessive predilection for history and Prophetic practices consider *Sehad Sitta* to be the most definitive expression of the oral revelation should realize that even the scholars and the



traditionists have yet to arrive at a consensus about the six collections. As to the question of declaring them as authentic, apart from Bukhari and Muslim, all other compilers, according to their own admissions, have included inauthentic Hadith. Even the authenticity of the first two *sehad*, about which it is given out that there is consensus among scholars, is open to question. The *Sahih Bukhari* itself contains traditions that, not to speak of the parameters of technical verification, cannot be called true even on the basis of known and significant historical events. Despite Bukhari's deep insight and foundational status, those who regard his compilation as 'the most authentic book after the Book from Allah' (*as'had kitab ba'd kitab Allah*), not only commit the error of designating a purely human endeavor of research and scrutiny as sacred, but also close their eyes to the entire historical and cultural background that made a momentous task such as the compilation of *Sahih Bukhari* possible. A proper appreciation of Bukhari's effort will be possible only when we keep that background in mind.

Although Bukhari's *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* has been accorded the status of the most authentic source of the oral revelation, his other works could not achieve the same status. No one knows how many compilations of traditions prepared by the traditionists have been lost with the passage of time. Even the other works of Bukhari which should be considered equally useful sources of the traditions are not available now. For instance, his *Kitab Al-Hiba* about which his scribe Muhammad Ibn Hatim says that this book was so all-encompassing that it could not be compared with the book on the same topic by Waki', Jarrah and Abdullah bin Mubarak. The narrator says that if Waki's book had only two or three Hadith with unbroken chain, Abdullah bin Mubarak had only five, whereas in Bukhari's book there were five hundred Hadith on this topic. Similarly, Bukhari's other books such as *Musnad Al-Kabeer*, *Al-Tafseer Al-Kabeer*, *Kitab Al-Riqaq*, *Kitab Zua'fa Al-Kabeer*, *Qazaya Al-Sahabah Wal-Tabai'in* can only be encountered in the books of history, not in real life. Allama Ibn Al-Mulaqqin, the interpreter of the *Bukhari* writes: ومن الغريب ما في كتاب الجهر بالبسملة لأبي سعد إسماعيل بن أبي القاسم البوشخي عن البخاري أنه صنف كتاباً فيه مائة الف حديث، i.e., Imam Abi Sa'd bin Ismail bin Al-Qasim Al-Bushaikh is reported to have said a rather little known fact about Imam Bukhari that the Bukhari had compiled a book of traditions where he had gathered some one hundred thousand Hadith. What to speak of Bukhari, no one knows how many works by the specialists in the art, which includes the volumes by Abdullah bin Mubarak and Imam Thawri who were revered greatly by their students at the time, are no longer available. Thousands of compilations by the experts in the art, some of which have been mentioned by the author of *Kashf Al-Zunoon*, have been lost, but no

one thinks that a part of the Faith has been lost because of their loss. If the sanctity of Islam is not hurt and the process of preserving the Faith is not harmed by the loss of Bukhari's collections consisting of one hundred thousand Hadith, there is no reason why other compilations of Hadith should be considered as an essential source of the Faith without which the elucidation and interpretation of Islam is not possible.

In awarding Bukhari's compilation the status of *أصح كتاب بعد كتاب الله* and that of a sacred book rather than a book of authenticated history, those dreams that provide validation to Hadith by establishing a direct connection with the Prophet had also a great role to play. In the third chapter we have described how the doors to the prophethood were sought to keep open through the means of dreams and how they were declared to be the 46<sup>th</sup> part of the Apostleship. When the authentic reports, at any phase, were used in the same sense as the Revelation, this was exploited by some people who used this means, which is purely a unscholarly method, to accord their favorite books some credibility, even awarding them a sacred status.<sup>52</sup> The supporters of Bukhari also exploited to the hilt this method of according credibility and sacredness to Hadith. In this context, they quote a dream dreamt by the imam in which he saw himself walking behind the Prophet. He saw that he was following exactly the footsteps of the Prophet. A similar dream was also narrated through Najam bin Fudhail that the Prophet came out of his holy grave, and as he walked Bukhari was following him in his footsteps. Another dream was narrated on the authority of Abu Zaid Maruzi that one night he dreamt when he was sleeping between *Maqame Ibrahim* and the Black Stone in Makkah. He dreamt that the Prophet was saying, 'O Abu Zaid, how long shall you go on teaching Shafei's book despite the presence of my book?' Abu Zaid reports – 'I asked – O Allah's Prophet, which one is your book?' The reply was – '*Al-Jami' Al-Saheeh* compiled by Muhammad bin Ismail Al-Bukhari.'<sup>53</sup>

To support the claim that *Bukhari's* compilation was divinely inspired it was not only that dreams were pressed into service but also it was asserted that this compilation was purely the result of divine suggestions and divine guidance (*istikhara*). It is said that before selecting a Hadith, the imam would undertake a purifying bath and seek divine guidance, and he accepted only those Hadith which satisfied him on all counts. There is no doubt that this sort of caution and piety are not unusual among scholars of tradition and their cultural heritage.<sup>54</sup> However, people went much beyond this and claimed such extraordinary merit and unbelievable retentive power for the human compilers of *Sehah Sitta* as were never witnessed before in human history and have not been witnessed since. It was said that these leading traditionists had extraordinary intellectual capabilities. They could retain hundred thousands of Hadith in their

memory at one time. They were equipped with the capability of selecting a few thousand authentic and most reliable Hadith out of a vast repertoire of several hundred thousands of Hadith, merely on the strength of their memory. It was also claimed that the memory of traditionists was sharpened to an extraordinary extent because of their practice of memorizing Hadith, and that for declaring anyone hafiz-e Hadith it was expected that he must have memorized 3 hundred thousand Hadith, or at least, one hundred thousand of them. Bukhari whose *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* is said to have been selected from six hundred thousand Hadith, said about himself: أحفظ مائة ألف حديث صحيح. ومأتي ألف حديث غير صحيح.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, when we say that Imam Ahmad's *Musnad* or Imam Muslim's *sahih* have been selected out of a range of three hundred thousand Hadith each, it is assumed that these gentlemen had preserved this vast number of Hadith in their memory. The requirements for a *hafiz-e Hadith* also point to the fact that these leading traditionists must have had a similarly vast number of Hadith preserved in their memory. Abu Zar'a was reputed to have memorized seven hundred thousand Hadith even though no collection of his has reached us.

Whether it was considered essential for a perfect traditionist to memorise three hundred thousand Hadith or the claim regarding Abu Zar'a that he knew seven hundred thousand Hadith, the fact remains that these claims point to the extraordinary retentive power of the traditionists which borders on the supernatural. A natural corollary of accepting this fact as true would be to assume that those who could demonstrate such supernatural capability in matters of memorizing Hadith must have been equally capable in matters of historiography, knowledge and piety – much above the level of ordinary people. That is why rather than regarding these books as ordinary human compilations, they should be treated as the results of the efforts of people possessing supernatural capabilities. The fact is – if one takes a close look at such exaggerated claims on behalf of the memorizers of Hadith that one encounters off and on, one realizes that these historical accounts are not as true as they are generally supposed to be. Taking the claim on behalf of Abu Zar'a that he knew seven hundred thousand Hadith, or on behalf of Bukhari that he knew three hundred thousand Hadith, they make such a vast number that no ordinary mortal can retain them with all their contextual information in his mind. Particularly in a situation where the repetition of the same Hadith by the same group of reporters could have created great confusion as the versions differed in the use of words, emphases, the order of the reporters etc. If these three hundred thousand Hadith are taken to be separate and independent ones, then their cumulative length, even by a conservative estimate, would run into about 120 volumes where each volume consists of 500 pages. This would be

the case in a situation where the lengthy Hadith and the shorter ones would be written in such a way that five Hadith are recorded on one page. Thus, to remember three hundred thousand Hadith that run into 120 volumes, along with their proper and legitimate contexts, is such an extraordinary feat of human memory that it cannot be found either before the emergence of these traditionists or after them. On similar counts, the number of Hadith purported to be remembered by Abu Zar'a would run into 275 volumes of 500 pages each. For any individual to retain such a vast number of Hadith in his memory has to be a myth that cannot be supported by history or in terms of human experience. However much we exaggerate the retentive power of the Arab mind, asserting that the Arab people could remember the pedigree of their animals and horses back to several generations, it cannot transform a myth into reality. Then when our traditionists refer to the desert-dwellers in support of their arguments, they totally ignore the fact that almost all the traditionists referred to in the context of compilation of Hadith were non-Arabs and not desert-dwellers.<sup>56</sup> This fact also invites reflection that when Abu Bakr Siddiq who, because of his special importance as one of the early companions (*as-sabeqoon al-awwaloon*) derived the maximum advantage from the Prophet's close proximity, was reported to have collected about five hundred Hadith, he discarded them because of the slightest possibility that they might have contained something not uttered by the Prophet. Or in case he (Abu Bakr) might have misunderstood any one of the Prophet's utterances. Just think about this – Abu Bakr had doubts about remembering just five hundred Hadith, and that too when he took help from copyists. But the retentive power of the traditionists in the third century hijra suddenly became so stupendous that they could remember as many as three hundred thousand Hadith!

It must be remembered that Bukhari whose *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* came to be regarded as the most reliable source of the sunnah in the years following him, many people regarding its compilation to have been done under divine guidance with the purpose of preserving the sunnah, did not enjoy a sacred status during his lifetime. His contemporary traditionists' disagreement with him, and in many cases, his own disagreement with many of his teachers on the principles of testing Hadith, created his circle of influence, just like those of other traditionists. Just as he had very loyal followers, he had very strong detractors too. And all these were people who were familiar names in the world of Hadith scholarship. They were dedicated to reading, studying, propagating and teaching Hadith. It is said that when Imam Muhammad bin Yahya Zahli who, during Bukhari's period, was known as a pioneer traditionist and who was Bukhari's classmate and the teacher of Imam Muslim, had disagreements with

Bukhari on the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an, it seriously affected Bukhari's popularity for sometime as people held Imam Yahya Zahli in high esteem. Zahli was quite inflexible in his views on the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an, and opined that one should have no truck with a man who did not believe in *لفظي بالقرآن غير مخلوق*. According to historians, in view of Zahli's great scholarship and vast popularity, Imam Bukhari suffered such setback in public esteem that he was left with no notable followers except for his disciple, Imam Muslim.<sup>57</sup> It is another matter that in the later years Bukhari's extraordinary merit in compiling and editing the Hadith consolidated his position as a remarkable traditionist. When the reputation of other traditionists died with them, Bukhari's compilation not only immortalized him but also in the subsequent years it slowly acquired the status of one of the most important sources of the sunnah. This was so much so that scholars wrote commentaries on his compilation and the leading practitioners of the art of Hadith, finding the principles and conditions formulated by Bukhari for the testing of Hadith more rigorous and authentic, accepted his *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* as an important reference book. However, history does not corroborate the assumptions that Bukhari's current status has been decided by Allah, and that at a particular moment of history he was appointed to his task of collecting and preserving the slowly vanishing sunnah through divine intervention. Or, as it is sought to be conveyed with the help of some alleged dreams, after the compilation of *Bukhari*, the community had accepted it unanimously and that it enjoyed the status of 'the most correct book after the Book of Allah.'

### SUMMING UP

One consequence of according extraordinary authenticity to history and allowing it a key role in the understanding of the Revelation was that history not only obfuscated our comprehension of the Revelation but also made it difficult for us to chart our program for the future. The compilations of the Prophet's utterances and practices not only created a hedge around the Revelation but also created insurmountable hurdles in planning the future of the community. Our ejection from the privileged position of leadership came about as a result of limiting the scope of the Revelation, even dismissing it. The reports not only dimmed the past, but engendered deep cynicism for the future as well. The objective of statements like — *بدأ الإسلام غريباً — وسيعود غريباً* — was to create a climate of despair for the future. The forecast about the society established by the Prophet Muhammad to the effect that much of it would disappear in the coming thirty years was a product of this deep-seated cynicism.<sup>58</sup>

Reclaiming the Revelation, which is essential for our future prospects, is not possible as long as we are not able to confine history within its own limits. The injunction on copying Hadith through the instruction – لا تكتبوا عني – and the permission for oral description with such stern warning – من كذب علي متعمداً فليتبوأ مقعده في النار – are indicative of this cautious and balanced attitude towards history. As long as history is studied as history we can derive insights from it. However, when history is viewed as above scrutiny and revaluation and wears the mantle of sacredness like the Revelation, it creates serious delusions in the world of thought. It is understandable that regarding the chronicle of a sacred period as mere history is not an easy task, but we have to remember that the earlier communities were led astray precisely because of this inability. Who can deny the value of sunnah as the Prophetic model and his love for it, but this fact should not come in the way of the investigation, scrutiny and evaluation of Hadith.

For a proper understanding of history it is also necessary that we should avoid the excesses taken recourse to by our predecessors on many occasions. History is not some cult-making polemics that it should be studied through sectarian lenses, nor has it the sacred status of the Revelation that any attack on it from outside should be considered an attack on Islam. To respond in such a way would only add to the misconceptions created by the predecessors.<sup>59</sup> The status of the Prophetic utterances and practices cannot be that of non-recital or apocryphal revelation (*wahi ghair matlu*), as the compilers of the volumes themselves did not claim any such thing, nor is it advisable to dismiss this extremely valuable historical treasure that has been put together on rigorous principles of testing and criticism altogether by saying that it is absolutely useless. There is no doubt about the fact that history, however authentic, cannot be regarded as the source of the Faith. But, this is also equally true that the communities that do not have the awareness to study history in all its dimensions cannot chart out their future with any sense of direction. The basic mistake committed by those who claim to be 'adherents of the Qur'an' (*ahl-e Qur'an*) and we have dubbed them as 'deniers of Hadith' (*munkareen-e Hadith*) was that they were so incensed by some dubious and misleading reports that they lost the courage or patience to read between the lines. On the other hand, those who tried to harmonize conflicting reports simply by means of *ittisal* and declared them the immortal source of *wahi ghair matlu*, ended up getting imprisoned in the trap created by them. There was no way open to them except declaring that all the conflicting reports regarding the sunnah were simultaneously valid, whose chains reached up to the Prophet at different times. But these people forgot the fact that through such statements history was negating its own

validity. Moreover, they could not determine any clear-cut policy about what was to be done with the reports that were rejected. Some people characterized these disagreements regarding the reports as plurality or breadth of opinions<sup>60</sup> and declared it to be a special blessing from Allah. Statements were even attributed to venerable figures to the effect that had there been no disagreement among the Prophet's Companions, they would have been disappointed<sup>61</sup> because it is due to this plurality of opinions, that now Muhammad's followers have the opportunity to choose from a large range of sunnah. We have deliberately turned our eyes away from the history of the earlier communities when they through similar so-called breadth of opinions, disagreements and oral revelations had constructed such a skyscraper of jurisprudence that it, ultimately, resulted in abdicating the responsibility enjoined by the Revelation.

To read between the lines of history is not possible in a tradition that itself has accorded it the position of *wahi ghair matlu*. In other words, we will have to formulate principles for the purging of history. The principles according to which these collections had come to light were good enough for the time when they were formulated, but to declare that those principles cannot be subjected to scrutiny anymore, and that the Predecessors, along with the text of history, have put the historical principles beyond our scrutiny, not only amounts to a denial of human intellect but also a denial of the divine manifestations that are taking the universe from better to the best endlessly. If the process of becoming (*fayakun*) is still ongoing, how was the final word uttered on it, or the fact that in matters of understanding of history, we cannot go beyond the Predecessors? No other source of knowledge, except the Revelation, can ever have a sense of finality. As for the principles of the testing of Hadith, the fact is that the real status of the single-transmitter reports is yet to be determined in a definitive way.

Those who dare to read between the lines of history cannot accord it the status of the source of Faith. However, in the matters of interpretation of the Faith, history can certainly light up our way. This is the purpose of the Prophetic utterances and practices which, in the context of the interpretation of the Revelation, can be termed as the expression of a moderate point of view. However, to extract this from authenticated history it is necessary that we take a fresh look at the underpinnings of the principles of history. When we admit the fact that we cannot base our Faith on single-transmitter reports, that we cannot institute any change, addition or deletion in the Qur'an, then there is no reason why single-transmitter reports should be validated to perform the august responsibility of interpreting the Qur'an. We will have to reflect and ponder over such issues with a balanced mind and passionless heart. The issues where an

individual is affected on a personal level, for example, personal transactions, inheritance etc. when the Qur'an declared evidence by two witnesses to be necessary. Then there are issues that affect not the individual alone, but the family or the society, for instance, in case of *qazaf*, the number witnesses goes up to four. Then for those occasions where it is not possible for someone to be present, in addition to circumstantial evidence or other kinds of evidence, the provision for oaths of various degrees has been made. And then when the matter exceeds the limits of all the above and the Faith or the Apostleship gets involved, then *mubahila* is resorted to. In other words, the standard of the evidence gets progressively more rigorous depending on the importance, range and gravity of the issue. The evidence or confession or oath by an individual, however genuine that individual might be, his statements cannot be considered the source of the Faith or a definitive source for the interpretation of the Faith. For this, it is necessary that an entire generation should stand witness to another generation. As it is said in the Qur'an: [2:143] وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ. Whatever has been disseminated by the Prophet to his followers, including the Revelation, it is enjoined upon them (the followers) that they, as the 'witnesses to humanity' (*shuhada alan-naas*), should disseminate it to others. This process of dissemination goes on from one generation to another and from one group to another. This is the most genuine and heavenly means of the dissemination of the interpretation of the Book along with the Book, and the understanding of the Revelation along with the Revelation, through which such a vast number of human beings transfer the Prophetic model from an entire generation to another, without the scope of any doubt or reservation or any single-transmitter report.

The knowledge of the Prophetic model derived through the just Ummah as the inheritors of the entire heritage of the Prophet are known as 'uninterrupted sunnah' in the terminology of the traditionists. There cannot be any ambiguity about them, nor is there any need to preserve them in books in the form of history. A set of living practices transmitted by an entire generation to another cannot be made into a compilation of lifeless rituals. The discussions on its outwardly manifest precision may be regarded as knowledge of the Faith; rather it should encompass the spiritual dimensions in such a way that debates about the outward forms should not take place at all. As opposed to this, the task of searching for sunnah in the pages of history makes us dependent on the understanding of historians and reporters who, despite all their profundity of knowledge and religious piety, cannot take history beyond their personal insights or visions.<sup>62</sup> While the uninterrupted sunnah fructifies their relationship with the inheritors of the Revelation, history gives birth to new sources



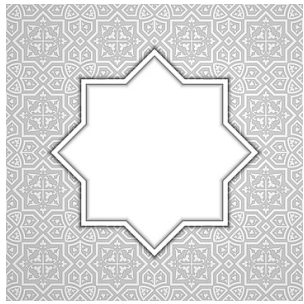
through extra-scriptural references. The concept of *Hadith-e Qudsi* amongst us engendered the concept of another Qur'an in addition to the Qur'an, which is something in between history and Revelation. The efforts to search not merely the sayings of the Prophet but the sayings of Allah in the pages of history have created serious misunderstanding not only about the sunnah but about the Revelation as well. When history becomes so important that its scope extends much beyond recording the quotidian of the Prophet but pretends to recover the Revelation, then it becomes natural that an independent concept of faith will be developed on the basis of that. Today, if we have many books of blessings as opposed to the Book of Allah, and the description of the special effects of some of the surah could take precedence over the recitation of the Book, it is due to this extra-scriptural status of history. The truth is – the concept about sunnah that their status is that of *wahi ghair matlu* or that status of the books of Hadith is only secondary in Islam is something that is only stated rather than followed. Otherwise, what happened in practice is that these compilations of Hadith have consolidated their position so much with reference to sunnah that now they do not need any validation or approval from the Revelation. If the position of compilations of reports and Hadith was not fully consolidated, then there would have been no reason for each faction of the community having its favourite source of 'wahi ghair matlu', and its members considering it sufficient to provide a basis for their point of view. The dependence of *ahl-e sunnah wal-jama'*, the mainstream Muslims, on *Sehah Sitta* or *Kutb Tisa'a* and the Shiites on the four books, namely, *Al-Kaafi* (d.229), *Ibn Babuya* (d.381), *Istibsar Tusi* (d.426) and *Nahj Al-Balagha* (d.406) should be seen in this light.

It is said that Bayazid Bustami did not eat muskmelon throughout his life as he did not know the exact way the Prophet ate it. This concept of sunnah, besides paying attention to finer points, also lays excessive emphasis on external details that can be supplied only by historical sources. Those who consider this kind of painstaking emphasis on excessive external details to be an essential requirement of the Faith should better know that in this day and age there is no point in adopting such an attitude. Not just to speak of the particular way the Prophet ate muskmelon, it is not possible for us today even in the case of an obligatory and continuous practice like *salah* to say definitively as to how the Prophet had performed his last *salah*. (Whether there was one or two *takbeer* in *iqamat*; whether 'amen' was said loudly or simply muttered under breath; whether those performing *salah* behind the imam had the permission to read surah Fatiha or not; whether the hands were raised up to earlobes or not; whether during *qiyam* the hands were tied or free; and whether people only

turned to side for the final *salam* or to both the sides). Therefore, all those who believe that the sunnah is a mere mindless imitation of each and every action of the Prophet and that it can be envisioned anew from historical material, should know that no corpus of history howsoever exhaustive it might be can come to their rescue. As for those who consider adherence to the Prophet's *uswah* or model, rather than the sunnah, enough for them, they have the Qur'an in its eternal and original glory in their midst, to serve as the most authentic source of that model.

SECTION V

Fiqh



# The Qur'anic Revelation: A Hostage to Juristic Speculations

﴿ اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهَبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ... ﴾

Faith, once transformed into jurisprudence, becomes a negation of the Faith itself. Christ's admonition of the Israeli rabbis that they sifted mosquitoes and swallowed camels was, in fact, a strong denial of this Faith propped up by this art of jurisprudence that, through reference to the Faith, had defeated the very purpose of the Faith itself.<sup>1</sup> Christ could gather only a small number of companions (apostles) around him, courtesy of the oppressive and strict juristic system of the Israelites. But the way he instilled the message of a spiritual life in those chosen few was nothing short of a miracle in that stagnant environment. To bring back the dead to life, to heal the sick and to familiarize the closed, stagnant and imitative minds with a revitalizing message – all these tasks needed the arrival of a prophet and Christ fulfilled this need. Christ familiarized people with a mode of God's worship whereby, in the years following him, people could perform their worship of God, without commands and edicts and without the juristic injunctions imposed by the clergy. In the history of religions, Christ's status is that of a transitional prophet operating between jurisprudence and meta-jurisprudence. Though we are not qualified to comment upon the achievements of a prophet, to understand the journey from jurisprudence to the deeper objective of jurisprudence, and to trace the evolutionary journey from rituals to unconditional surrender, the reference to the comment by the Christ on the juristic religion becomes inevitable. The Qur'an, that enjoys the status of the final document on the means and methods of worship, basically exhorts non-juristic compliance (to the Revelation). It refers to Muhammad as a Prophet whose Prophethood was intended to release people from the stranglehold of the rules and rituals devised by the clergy: وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِضْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ [7:157]. In the Qur'an, unconditional devotion and total surrender have been stressed again and again. It strongly objects to the attitudes adopted by the jurists. Verses such as لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهُ لُحُومَهَا وَلَا دِمَائُهَا [22:37], and لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تُولُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ [2:77],

illustrate this point. What Allah wants is piety and total surrender of the people, not their mindless rituals or their acts of going through certain motions mechanically.

The truth is – the Qur'an claims to establish the kingdom of God on earth that should be free from juristic accretions and complications. The sign of unconditional devotion and willing submission is that in His obedience the individual should not seek any logical essence but surrender himself totally to the object of worship. As opposed to this, a juristic mind, because of its quest for *ratio legis* not only stifles the spirit of worship but also for the believers, it transforms the simplest of the acts enjoined upon by Allah into an infinitely complex task. The dialogue between Moses and the community of Israel described in the Qur'an is an apt example of this where, immediate obedience to – *إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً* [2:67], the juristic hair-splitting and debates not only made a simple task difficult, rather, the quite undesirable juristic exercises stifled the spirit of worship altogether. This reality has been brought to the fore in the dialogue between Moses and the community of Israel. Whereas Faith demands unconditional surrender, jurisprudence puts hurdles in its way through its tendency to bring in unnecessary details that distract attention from the central issue. At many places in the Qur'an, such people as want to see the Faith illuminated by juristic interpretation have been condemned: *لَا تَسْأَلُوا عَنْ أَشْيَاءَ إِنْ تُبَدَّ لَكُمْ تَسْؤُكُمْ وَإِنْ سَأَلْتُمْ عَنْهَا* وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حُجُّ الْبَيْتِ *مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا* [5: 101]. It is said that when the verse *مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا* was revealed, someone wanted to clarify the juristic question from the Prophet whether the duty of hajj was enjoined upon the believers as an act that had to be performed every year. The narrator reports that in the beginning the Prophet maintained silence on the issue. However, when he asked again and again the Prophet showed his displeasure at it and said: 'If I say yes, then it would be obligatory' (لوقلت).<sup>2</sup> This reply should not lead anyone to the erroneous supposition that the Prophet, on his own, could add or alter anything in the Divine Commandment. Any such thought would run counter to the Qur'anic paradigm.<sup>3</sup> The Prophet's admonition was, in fact, intended to send the message of unconditional obedience, beyond any logic or ratiocination.

Jurisprudence, in its very nature, contains enough possibility for destruction. If the Faith is understood to establish a direct rapport with the Revelation and the inexpressible phenomenon that comes into existence because of divine sparks, the whole emphasis of jurisprudence is on human understanding and interpretation of Revelation and the external manifestations and rituals. If Faith accepts Revelation to be invested with the grandeur of eternal light that illuminates ever-newer aspects of the Divine, jurisprudence considers the interpretive and elucidatory literature to be sacred

and even autonomous. It even goes so far as to insist on according human interpretation and elucidation the status of an additional or functional Revelation. As a result of the emergence of this juristic literature consisting of human interpretation, claiming to be autonomous and free from Revelation, people's relationship with the Revelation gets progressively weaker and weaker.

As jurisprudence is driven by its need to search for commands and edicts, the juristic intellect does not take into account a holistic or comprehensive view of the Revelation. It merely concentrates on those verses that would allow it to extract juristic commands and laws. Then, in practice, it so happens that after the juristic inferences and drawing of laws (*istikhrāj*), the Revelation becomes for it like a tasteless fruit, whose essence and pulp have been squeezed out. However, those who consider jurisprudence to be a genuine and valuable treasure, for them it is not perhaps difficult to suffer from such delusions. The mushrooming of juristic literature consisting of inferences and speculations of all kinds leads to a situation where the function of the Revelation remains effectively suspended. In the life of the communities when once the lamp of Revelation is extinguished, it becomes difficult to resist its free fall. Whether it is the deposition of the Israelites from the seat of power or the dislodging of Muslims from the position of the most favored community, the basic reason in both the cases has been the excessive growth of human interpretations around the Revelation. In their hour of downfall, if the Israelites committed the error of declaring the texts of Talmudic interpretive literature to be of the same status as that of the sacred Book, and if there was a widespread belief among them that during the diasporic moments when there was chaos and confusion in their world of thought, the often competing and contradictory writings of Talmud helped them preserve their religious life. And having led this so-called religious life for thousands of years if they do not find a new dawn in their world of thought and a revitalization of their spiritual life, the reason for this lies in the kind of religious life that they have adopted as the key to get out of their state of decline and the non-divine texts that they have accepted as the Revolutionary Book. The non-divine sources and the writings of Israeli jurists can only accentuate the period of decline, it cannot break the vicious circle. To resist their own decline, when Muslims endeavored to rectify and remove their own mistakes, and when they realized that a hedge was being built around the Revelation through the inferences and speculations of jurisprudence, they declared the doors to further exegetical interpretation shut. This step has, at least, stopped the growth of new schools of thought. However, one unintended consequence of this step was that the older schools gained a kind of permanent legitimacy and authority. Thus, the same means through

which decline had set in were now adopted for redressing it. The result was that the period of decline became longer and longer. Our efforts to adopt the same means that caused our decline to offset it put paid to all the possibilities of a new dawn. The consequence of adopting the four Imams as permanent sources for the Faith led to a situation where, beyond the Qur'an, a lot of books by the four Imams and their disciples came on the scene, all claiming to be books of guidance for the believers. Each jurisprudic view ran counter to the other and contradictory and conflicting statements were attributed to the jurisprudent. The inevitable result of this phenomenon was that the majority of Muslims not only lost touch with the Revelation, but also they faced serious conceptual and intellectual confusion when they were offered inferences and laws in the name of the Revelation. As all the spheres of religious life were being governed by different schools of jurisprudence, to live a religious life it was considered enough by the members of *ahl-e sunnah* to follow the four imams, and by those of the Shia community to follow Fiqh Jafri. That is why no one would even think why, despite the presence of the Qur'an, the inferences drawn from it (*istinbati wahi*) have become the immortal sources of the Revelation. The process of drawing laws (*takhrij*) reached such a point that far-fetched speculations were resorted to on the basis of the Great Jurisprudents and the schools of thought they fostered. If a statement by any of the four Imams was available, then similar issues were sought to be resolved on the basis of that statement. Rather, on any issue, the *ratio legis* was first sought, and on that *ratio legis* other issues emerging from time to time were sought to be sorted out. Those engaged in the task of formulating laws did not only formulate them on the basis of the utterances and practices of their own imams, but also drew inferences from their silences as well. The earlier generation of Muslims by virtue of their insight into the Qur'an and sunnah were *mujtahid fid-deen* i.e. to say independent practitioners of religion. However, as time passed by, the latter generations considered it enough to follow the juristic parameters set by an specific Imam. If they did any reconsideration at all they thought it necessary to work within the given parameters of a specific school rather than drawing any direct inference from the book of God. The role of the Revelation in the Muslim society became so minimal that for the mujtahid of the time it was considered enough to follow some text of jurisprudence rather than directly accessing the Book and the sunnah. In the words of Shah Waliullah: من حفظ المبسوط كان مجتهداً أي وإن لم تكن له علم برواية أصلاً ولا بحديث واحد.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the early scholars of Hadith had fallen victims to the misconception that if an individual had knowledge of about 300,000 or 500,000 reports, it entitled him to declare edicts on religious issues, similarly this impression gained ground in the circle



of jurists that the study of jurisprudence was enough for guiding people in their religious pursuits. Some old-style scholars even declared Jurisprudence to be of equal weight as the Book of Allah<sup>5</sup>, and some said that the study of jurisprudence enjoyed greater merit than the study of the entire Qur'an. When the juristic literature gained extraordinary importance and became almost a substitute for the Book of Guidance it led to the following consequences: first, the majority of Muslims got alienated from the Qur'an, the ultimate Book of Guidance; second, it brought into existence an unending cycle of compiling and editing texts of guidance that replaced the Revelation; thirdly, the juristic deliberations that came into existence through *tafaqqoh* and *tadabbur* which, in later years, gained a sacred status through the idioms of the four Imams. This put insurmountable hurdles in the way of direct access to the Qur'an. Great mujtahids engaged themselves in removing these obstacles, revolutionary intellectual movements were undertaken, but they proved ineffective in the face of misconceptions that had accumulated over the ages. The truth is that these hurdles are yet to be removed. To challenge the sacred status of the four imams, personalities from their own camps emerged. Mention may be made of such famed figures as Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Hazm, Muhammad bin Abdulwahab, Imam Ghazali, Shah Waliullah and Muhammad Iqbal. But partly because of some inadequacy in their critical apparatus, and partly because of the oppressive presence of the concept of sacred history, in the coming years, their revolutionary messages were treated as merely reformatory or corrective efforts. The climate of intellectual tyranny, established through references to the four imams, remained there as before. If they said anything remarkable it was simply this – the community was now in need of a new Abu Hanifa or Shafei. Such statements, instead of refuting the sacred status of the four imams, were seen to confirm it. Of course, those who were aware of the deviations coming through jurisprudence, and who were familiar with the reality that the cause of the decline of the community of Islam was the suspension of the duties enjoined upon by the Revelation and its replacement by human sources as the texts of guidance, and who also recognize the fact that the main reason for our decline in the world of thought is that extra-Qur'anic sources have gained respectability, cannot ignore the fact that the community does not require another Abu Hanifa or Shafei who would acquire a permanent sacred status, in opposition to the Revelation. The necessity is for intellects like those of Imam Auzai or Sufian Thawri, individuals like Hammad and Nakhe'i who, in their own times, carry out the basic responsibility of facilitating the understanding of the Faith, but do not become idols for the future generations. Otherwise what would happen is that the revolutionary voices emerging out of the camps of the four imams would, eventually,

be reduced to an extension of the schools of thought fostered by those camps only, and these critics and revolutionaries, despite their deep critical scholarship and revolutionary spirit, would be seen merely in the context of their relationship with the conventional schools of thought.

### REVEALED ISLAM VERSUS HISTORICAL ISLAM

We have already pointed out in the earlier chapters how the interpretation and the real message of Revelation became a victim of countless misconceptions because of declaring history as an inevitable means to understand it. Once the concept of *wahi ghair matlu* or a supplementary *wahi* gained credibility, it was natural that the interpretations emanating on this basis would also gain permanent or quasi-permanent credibility. In the coming years the impression gained ground that the Faith was not limited to whatever is contained in the pages of the Qur'an, but the historical sources of the utterances and practices, and even the comments of the scholars of Islam and their inferences and deductions should be considered as additional sources of the Faith. Thus, these were accepted under the rubrics of the two supplementary sources of jurisprudence, namely, 'consensus' (*ijma'*) and 'deduction or speculation' (*qiyas*). As the misconception that the Qur'an does not contain all the details of religious life had become common, it was given out that the picture of Islamic life presented in the texts of reports and practices compiled by the traditionists is, in fact, one of the means of divine intervention to preserve the Faith. After that there was no reason why the disagreements issuing from such reports should not be declared to have been desired by Allah. Some opined that the Qur'anic statement, 'Follow the knowledgeable' (فَاسْأَلُوا (أَهْلَ الدِّكْرِ), in fact, points to the four imams. No doubt that some raised objection to this kind of exaggeration, but it has not been possible to alienate the sacred status of the four imams from the Muslim thought. No one took the trouble to ask if the above Qur'anic statement really referred to the four imams, then, before the emergence of these individuals, to whom would the Muslims of the earlier age go to seek guidance and clarifications, and that how would they organize their religious life?

The revealed religion that has been described in the pages of the Qur'an had achieved completeness during the Prophet's lifetime in his own hands. **الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ** i.e., the Qur'anic confirmation of the completion of the Faith suggests that whether it was the four caliphs or the social and intellectual history of the Muslims of the first generation, whether it was the compilations of traditionists and jurists, or the juristic assemblies of the four imams, all these are part of a history that contains enough materials, in the nature of interpretation and elucidation, which might help

people in their understanding of particular contexts. But they certainly do not have the merit to be made parts of the Faith, or that they should be considered as an inevitable extension of the Islamic view of life.

However, as we have pointed out, after the first generation of Muslims departed from the scene, history began to be seen by us as containing the happy records of the utterances and practices of the Prophet and his Companions and extraordinary stress was laid on their compilation and memorization. This had a remarkable impact on our view of history. As the dividing line between the Revelation and history got blurred, the possibility that history could be seen as an extension of the Revelation became immense. Thus, instead of the real Islam, based on the Revelation, another concept of Islam gradually came into shape that was based on details and supplementary information. In addition to the Qur'an, this latter concept of Islam provided the Prophet's Companions, their followers (*tabe'in*), and the followers of followers (*tabe tabe'in*) as sacred models. Further, it also sought to justify disputes and disagreements in matter of Faith on the basis of such extremely weak traditions as – علماء أمّتي كأنبياء بني –<sup>6</sup> إسرائيل and اختلاف أمّتي رحمة<sup>7</sup>. Instead of proffering the Prophet as the role model, as endorsed by the Qur'an, the concept of the role model was extended to encompass Prophet's Companions as well. In other words, in this concept of the Faith there was no scope that the tradition on which this hypothesis was based could be proved to be beyond doubt through historical sources. The jurists who claimed that their inferences and logical deductions encompassed all activities of life could not have undertaken the compilation of the tomes of jurisprudence, as they did, without instituting some change in their concept of history.

Another mistake committed by the interpreters of Islam was that they accorded the status of the Prophet's Companion to persons who had even a passing glimpse of the Prophet.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that in an age when the Prophet's Companions were departing from the world one after another, the ordinary descriptions of those who had a glimpse of the Prophet would be turned into legends, and these people acquired a kind of importance merely on the strength of seeing the Prophet in a select assembly or a public gathering. However, despite the historical importance of such an encounter, these people cannot be placed in a position that was merited by those who enjoyed close proximity with the Prophet and who had the advantage of receiving his continuous tutelage.

The precedence gained by the historical Islam over the revealed Islam led to an extraordinary valorizing of history. Instead of looking at the history of the first century of Islam as a possible or applied model, people began to consider it as the only

authentic model. They ignored the fact that even during the times of the revered caliphs the Islamic life was a constantly evolving one. It was considered necessary at the time of Abu Bakr that changes should be incorporated in the pattern of life prevalent at the time of the Prophet. The venerable caliphs showed no qualms in instituting many changes in the policies of their predecessors in response to the changing circumstances of the time. Thus, there is no reason why we should consider the evolving society of that time and its changing responses as the single and permanent model for us. This exaggerated reverence for history paved the way for the canonization of the four imams in the subsequent periods. The hedge built around the Qur'an by history through its recourse to the sayings and practices finally reached its final and inevitable culmination in the organization and compilation of the juristic literature.

It is a matter of great surprise that a Faith that had come to sound the death knell of the institution of the clergy and whose revolutionary message consisted in establishing a direct relationship between the Creator and His creation, its followers, in the context of the understanding of the Faith, should create the idols of the four imams that would assume the status of an essential reference point in this regard. It cannot be said that in the last eleven or twelve centuries no great intellects were born in the community who had deep knowledge of the Book and the sunnah and who were conversant with the deeper objective of the Faith. However, if all these scholars and intellectuals, despite their profundity of thoughts and ideas, find themselves eventually compelled to take shelter in one or the other schools of jurisprudence, the primary reason for this is the predilection for idolatry that has infected the community, even though, from time to time, the concept of the four imams had been characterized by some as the reprehensible 'partial claim to prophethood' (*shirk fi an-nabuwwah*). Some people did express reservations about placing excessive confidence on the statements by the four imams and abiding by their weak and uncorroborated arguments and suppositions<sup>9</sup> as, according to them, to do so would be tantamount to placing a mujtahid in the position of a prophet. Nevertheless, despite the presence of this oppositional stance, the reality is that today, the four imams enjoy the status of mini prophets among the vast majority of Muslims. It is generally supposed that the organization and conduct of religious life is not possible without references to them. These mini prophets have such a strong hold on the community that even the books written by their disciples are considered to be essential and enduring sources of the Faith. For example, among the Hanafites, if on any issue, the opinions of the two celebrated pupils of Abu Hanifa, i.e., Yusuf and Muhammad come into conflict with

those of Abu Hanifa, then the edict is declared on the basis of Hanifa's statement, even if the argument put forward by the others seem more convincing, and then on the basis of the statement by Abu Yusuf, then that by Muhammad, and then that by Hasan bin Ziyad, in order of preference.<sup>10</sup>

This is the point of emergence of false prophets in the understanding of the Faith that has helped jurists attaining a sacred status. The assault of the jurists on the Faith has continued ever since through their writings that has created a barrier in the way of direct access to the Revelation for the community. Those who feel upset in seeing the transformation of a Faith like Islam into a Faith given shape by the jurisprudence produced by the four imams, and who are pained by the fact that their religious life, instead of being directly governed by the Revelation, now depends on the interpretations of other human beings like themselves, and who want to get out of this stranglehold of jurisprudence, should undertake a careful and hard-headed assessment of this decline and distortion in the Islamic thought. We have to ask ourselves why, despite the presence of the Qur'an amidst us, we have been compelled to depend on human interpretations and edicts to organize our religious lives. Does it behoove us that we should allow such centrality and accord such sacredness to the understanding of people like ourselves that it (the understanding) assumes the dimension of an alternative Revelation? The Qur'an castigates Judaism and Christianity, and designates the Muslim community with the heavenly epithet of *حنيفا مسلما*<sup>11</sup> rather than the Mohammadan community. Why have the members of such a community acceded to the artificial division of its people into different groups such as 'the Hanafites', 'the Malekites', 'the Shafeiites' and 'the Hanbalites'? How tyrannical can the concept of sacred history be that it has been able to suppress and frustrate almost all the intellectual revolutions that have taken place over the last one thousand years? We have also to seek out answer to the question as to why today people consider observance of religion not possible without following the four imams or the five jurists, or why do they spend all their innovative energies in tinkering with these discredited schools of thought? What is the basic reason for their delusion? It has also to be recognized that such a debacle in the world of thoughts and ideas cannot be studied without an investigation into those historical statements that played a crucial role in placing the four imams into their hallowed position.

#### ASK THE KNOWLEDGEABLE (فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الدُّعْرِ)

Those who are in favor of establishing the permanent institution of jurisprudence in Muslim thought adduce the Qur'anic statement, 'Ask the knowledgeable if you do not

know about it' (فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الدُّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ) to buttress their argument. Ostensibly, this statement gives the impression that the Qur'an desires that a group of 'men of knowledge' (أَهْلَ الدُّكْرِ) be appointed in the august position of interpreters of the Faith so that they can provide spiritual leadership and guide ordinary Muslims in the conduct of their religious life. To adduce this statement to justify the establishment of different schools of thought is, in fact, a telling comment on the method of jurisprudence. What can be a more glaring example of alienating words from their natural and original context (يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِ) than that the verse which, in its original context, is simply stating the fact that those who were invested with the glory of prophethood before Muhammad were also human beings. There is no reason why this verse should be alienated from its context to provide justification for the establishment of juristic schools. Read in the context where it occurs, فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الدُّكْرِ does not yield the same meaning as it does when it is read in isolation. Wherever the word *ulema* is used in the Qur'an, there is nothing to suggest that among Muslims a group of scholars has been appointed, for interpreting the Revelation to the common people and to provide them spiritual leadership. In the verse – فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ – too, one finds the reference to a band of people known for their piety, scholarship, hard work and self-discipline. But it has been declared that their duty is not to interpret the Faith but to – وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ – which is a duty that falls squarely in the realm of knowledge. Certainly, there was a group of people who achieved distinction as scholars in the Muslim society in the first phase of Islam, and it will continue to be so in all periods. The evolutionary journey of the Muslim society will not be possible without the two means of reason, i.e., knowledge derived through observation, and revelation i.e. *tafaqqoh fi al-deen*. However, the danger zone starts at the point where it is assumed that the evolution of observable knowledge continues, that the new observations open newer possibilities of knowledge through corroborating or falsifying earlier observations, whereas in the case of *tafaqqoh fi al-deen*, it is assumed that whatever the Predecessors had articulated because of their proximity with the age of the Prophet cannot be extended or improved upon. Thus, the canonization of *tafaqqoh fi al-deen* itself results in the negation of *tafaqqoh*.

In the Qur'an, references to *ulema* occur either in the context of the Israelite scholars [42:197] *أَوَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ آيَةٌ أَنْ يَعْلَمَهُ عُلَمَاءُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ*, or, by *ulema* is meant those scholars who, because of their observation and knowledge of the universe, remain in a state of awe and terror. In other words, to remain in awe of Allah, it is necessary that human beings should constantly reflect on His signs (*ayatul-Allah*). Knowledge is that basic attribute that can instill genuine piety in them: [35:28] *إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ*.

To adduce these statements to provide justification for a permanent institution of the ulema is too far-fetched to be convincing. But those who were bent upon introducing a kind of religious leadership in Islam first designated the ulema, as men of knowledge, to be the representatives of the Prophet. Such reports were brought to the fore as declared them to be inheritors of prophets. However, even designating them as representatives of the Prophet Muhammad or inheritors of the prophets was not enough to justify the creation of such a position of religious leadership because, as the representatives of the Prophet, the ulema could, at the most, only have the right to teach and preach. Under the circumstances, it was not possible for them to go beyond conventional interpretations. To get round this obstacle, they designated the Prophet to be the law-giver (شارع) rather than the interpreter (شاح) of the divine guidance. The phrase *shaare' alaihi as-salam* became so common among Muslims that very few people remembered the fact that the Prophet himself had to abide by the Divine Commandments. His role was to explain and elucidate the shariah, and not to create it. It should be pointed out that there were oppositional voices that could be heard from time to time. But those who were bent upon declaring the scholars among Muslims to be equal to the prophets of the Israelites<sup>12</sup> and those who had already fallen victims to the concept of sacred history were not in a position to recognize this aberration in the Islamic thought. The changing concepts of history soon assumed a sacred idiom in the assemblies of the jurists and the traditionists. To declare the scholars of Islam to be equal to the prophets of the Israelites, a range of fabricated traditions were brought to the fore that became part of the common knowledge of people. When religious leadership gained such credibility that it was considered equal to apostleship, then it was quite natural that it would create enough scope for human intervention in shariah in the name of juristic preference (*istihsan*) and *masalih mursala*. Someone declared that in the verses like – أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ – the authority that Muslims have been commanded by Allah to follow after Him and the Prophet is that of the ulema. Tyrannical rulers had already occupied the position of authority (*ulul amr*) by force. Rather than opposing this state of affairs, the scholars of Islam thought it an easier and safer option that they should arrogate to themselves the right to religious leadership with the help of newer interpretations of Qur'anic statements. Unlike the political leadership, the religious scholars had a certain halo of sacredness around them; they claimed to be the heirs to the prophets and the representatives of such a Prophet (i.e., Muhammad) who they confidently declared as the creator of the shariah. It was not at all surprising that they considered themselves as occupying the position of 'the deputies of the Prophet' (أمناء الشارع). This new status acquired by the scholars of

Islam and the jurists gave them the absolute right to determine and dictate religious affairs in the community by means of *istislah* (juristic consideration of equity or public interest in the formulation of a legal decision), *istihsan* and *masalih mursala*. In the coming days this belief gained ground that – ان العلماء وضعوا الأحكام حيث شاؤا بالاجتهاد – بحكم الإِثْر لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم i.e., the ulema had the right to devise commandments through *ijtihad*, a right they had inherited from the Prophet.<sup>13</sup>

This new status of the 'custodians of the Prophet's legacy' placed the Islamic scholars in a new position of religious leadership. Not only that they appropriated absolute right for elucidation and interpretation in the sphere of activities about which there are no clear directions in the Qur'an, but even the Qur'an itself did not escape their intervention. This new institution of religious leadership in the realm of Muslim thought soon led to a situation when the innovative decision of Islamic scholars acquired a seminal and permanent status. The position of the Qur'an and Hadiths became secondary. Abul Hasan Ubaidullah Al-Karkhi, a well-known imam of Hanafite jurisprudence even went so far as to assert, 'Every such verse that runs counter to the ways of our mentors should be considered either *moawwal* (not final) or abrogated; similarly, every such *Hadith* will also be considered either *moawwal* or abrogated.'<sup>14</sup>

The precedence gained by the 'custodians of the Prophet's legacy', in fact, signaled the beginning of a kind of Israelism in Islam. Among the Israelites, juristic interpretations had given birth to two different and competing schools known as Hillel and Shammai. In their religious history as they reached a stage when conflict arose between Revelation and the juristic speculations of the Rabbis, it compelled them to find a way out. The juristic method of Hillel that had begun with seven principles had been extended to thirteen principles when they were finally codified by Rabbi Ismail. The later jurists increased the number of principles to 132 and they provided such grounds for deduction and inferences which could defeat the very purpose of the Revelation. Baba Meitza contains a salutary study of this critical situation. It is said that when a strong disagreement arose among the Israeli jurists, after long debates and discussion, the decision of the majority was accepted. But there was one God-fearing rabbi in the assembly who was aware of the inadequacy in the juristic method of deduction and who realized that as a result of the interpretations of jurists, the message of the Revelation was almost suspended, and he challenged the decision of the majority. Then there was no option for this solitary rabbi except praying to God for divine intervention for the endorsement of his point of view. It is said that the prayer of this rabbi was heard and miracles began to appear in support of his view. So much so that a voice from the heaven confirmed and endorsed his point of



view. However, despite this divine intervention, the Israeli jurists refused to reconsider their decision. They were of the view that as God had once given away the Torah to human beings, it was now the prerogative of human beings to elucidate and interpret it according to their own needs and understanding. The concept of sacred history had such a strong hold on the minds of Israeli jurists that they were not ready to discount the sayings of their elders and their earlier jurists even if they had to disobey the Torah in the process. Unfortunately, the same phenomenon crept into the Muslim thought through the concept of 'the custodians of the Prophet's legacy' (أمناء الشارع).

In according respectability to this institution of religious leadership, the terms used in jurisprudence played an important role, even though those terms were initially coined to facilitate dissemination of meaning, and people were unaware of the hidden agenda that lay behind such coinage. The Qur'an exhorted the believers to acquire knowledge of the Muslim law and exercise prudence (تفقه و تدبر) in the conduct of life, and presented the signs of Allah in the universe as the key to all knowledge. However, the idiom used by the leading jurists had provided a concept of knowledge that divided the religious life and the worldly life in two separate compartments. And then the kind of knowledge that would enable students to apply their mind and heart independently, that, in the idiom of jurists, would make them mujtahids, was declared to be an obligatory duty only for a certain number of people in the society (فرض كفاية). It was now the popular belief that the presence of mujtahids was essential for the establishment and maintenance of the shariah. A large section of Islamic scholars soon fell victims to the misconception that knowledge meant knowledge of some specific texts, and participation in the assemblies of traditionists and jurists. Through knowledge of the Faith, which was largely an unfamiliar term in the world of Muslim thought, justification was provided for a class of mujtahids, who could guide people in specific religious activities.<sup>15</sup> The declaration of ijtihad as an obligatory duty for some people in the society (فرض كفاية) and the presence of mujtahids as an inevitable part of religious life led to the emergence of a class of mullahs, just like the Israeli rabbis or the Christian papacy. It is an established fact that there are references in the Qur'an to a class of people designated as 'Men of knowledge' (أصحاب علم) in the context of learning and teaching, and there was another class of people, known as *qurra*, who were sent to different tribes to preach Islam in the earlier years. However, the religious leadership that was sought to be established through declaring it an obligatory duty for only a group of people in the society (فرض كفاية) had nothing to do with them. According to this view, 'to undertake ijtihad was only a فرض كفاية and

not a فرض عين, that is why even if a single person performed this duty it was understood that it no longer remained binding on any one. And if no one performed the duty then each and every member of the society would be declared a sinner.' According to this view the shariah rulings for the new upcoming situations are settled by ijihad i.e. by deciphering the intent of the text and then employing its *ratio legis* in the given situation. However, if the new situation arises and there is no one to infer guidance the entire corpus of religious living remains suspended. That is why the existence of mujtahid is necessary.<sup>16</sup> The *qurra* or the scholars of the Qur'an who were once looked at as repositories of knowledge now with the declaration of ijihad to be a prerogative of the few only (فرض كفاية) also assumed the role of mujtahid and were considered by many as the ultimate religious authority. These humans became inevitable reference points and the concept of a Muslim society seemed inconceivable without them. To quote Shatibi: 'if a certain period is devoid of the presence of a mufti or a mujtahid, it would not be obligatory on anyone to obey the shariah, that era would be devoid of divine guidance and the commands of the shariah would stand suspended.'<sup>17</sup>

The status of the jurists as essential and inevitable reference points for the religious life led to the general impression among people that the Book and the sunnah, despite their enduring value, cannot illuminate our paths as long as Islamic scholars and jurists do not come forward to guide us, as they had the absolute right to elucidate and interpret the Book and the sunnah. Only they were thought to be conversant with the secrets of the shariah. They assumed such extraordinary importance that their absence created the impression that the shariah was suspended. There were oppositional voices, too, that were heard from time to time against this new religious leadership in Islam, that stressed the point that to believe in the jurists was not part of the Faith and that the jurisprudence was not revealed on the jurists like the Revelation so that Muslims should consider it obligatory to abide by them, or that they should consider the interpretations of jurists to be infallible. But this kind of healthy criticism could not make much headway as those who expressed this point of view were themselves victims of the misconception that others (i.e., the common people) inevitably needed to follow them (i.e., the jurists) as interpreters of the Book and the sunnah.<sup>18</sup>

The Qur'an had declared obedience to the Prophet (أطيعوا الرسول) as an extension of obedience to Allah (أطيعوا الله). The juristic interpretation of the Faith further extended the scope of this concept to incorporate the ulema into it. The result was – the hold of the Faith slackened and the grip of jurisprudence tightened in the Muslim society.

During the Prophet's time, his own presence resolved any issue relating to the interpretation of the Faith. It was the last opportunity for human kind when it could seek clarification on any issue directly from Allah through the Prophet. However, at such a crucial period of history, we do not get any references to any juristic assembly; nor does it occur to anyone that taking advantage of this extraordinary situation he should compile the views of the 'men of learning' in the form of religious edicts. Actually, during the period of the Prophet's Companions, there were some individuals who were distinguished by their depth of learning. Mention may be made to Abu Bakr Siddiq, Omer bin Khattab, Abdullah bin Mas'ud and Ali bin Abi Talib who, as the history books tell us, were particularly known for their deep understanding of the Faith and their worldly wisdom. During the rule of the venerable caliphs, numerous consultative assemblies were held in the presence of the Companions in the Prophet's mosque, and countless issues were discussed and debated. Some of these have been recorded in history books in different ways. This should also be kept in mind that the decisions of the caliphs that were arrived at after consultations with the senior among the Prophet's Companions had the merit of being considered as juristic precedents in the Muslim society and Muslim thought. Despite this, it was not considered necessary to preserve them, nor did the Companions help in any way in the establishment of a particular school of thought. Actually, if anyone deserved to establish a juristic school of thought in the context of the understanding of the Faith, it was the Prophet's Companions who were trained by him. But we do not find any trace of any school of thought named after either Abu Bakr or Omer or Othman or Ali. Nor do we find any juristic school named after such a profoundly learned scholar like Abdullah bin Mas'ud.<sup>19</sup> Then in the age of the successors of the Prophet's Companions, known as *tabe'in*, when the boundaries of the Caliphate extended far and wide, and the educational assemblies had a wider reach, extending to most of the countries of the world, the Muslim scholars and jurists extended their area of influence. In the Muslim society, the status of a person began to be determined on the basis of his learning, the slaves and criminals, the neo-Muslims and those owing allegiance to strange cultures began to take part in these educational assemblies. Even then no one ever thought of the fact that the assemblies held in those times could ever assume a permanent significance, or that in the coming years, through these very assemblies, the term 'four imams' would gain a sacred status.

Before the Prophet's Companions had departed from the world, their disciples had already established their assemblies in many cities of the globe. Each one of them was a man of opinion and wanted to make public the understanding of the Book and the

sunnah according to his own knowledge and comprehension, which he considered to be his duty. History books do not contain an exact number of these men of learning; however, there are those who have found mention in history books for one reason or another, and it can be said on the basis of that information that in the earlier centuries there were at least fifty scholars of the stature of Abu Hanifa and Shafei. Iqbal, in his address, enumerates nineteen such men of opinion and jurists who had emerged by the middle of the first century hijra.<sup>20</sup> Some historians have mentioned ten names with detailed information who had been imams and generally respected by all and sundry in their own times<sup>21</sup>. Among them were – Omer bin Abdul Aziz (d.101 hijra), Imam Sha'bi (d.103 hijra), Imam Ata bin Abi Rabah (d.115 hijra), Imam Al-A'amash (d.147 hijra), Ishaq bin Yaqub (d.138 hijra), Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq, Imam Auzai (d.157 hijra), Abdullah bin Shabarmah (d.144 hijra), Muhammad bin Abdur Rahman bin Abi Laila (d.148 hijra), Sufian Thawri (d.161 hijra), Lais bin Sa'd (d.175 hijra) Sharik Al-Nakh'i (d.177 hijra), Sufian bin Ainiya (d.198 hijra), Ishaq bin Rahwiya (d.138 hijra), Ibrahim bin Khalid alias Abu Saur (d.246 hijra), Dawood Zahiri (d.270 hijra) and Ibn Jarir Tabari (d.310 hijra). These people are counted among those who, even if their juristic works have not reached us, were, in their own times, not lesser scholars than either Abu Hanifa or Shafei. Besides, there were those who participated in debates with the above figures, agreed with their points of view or joined issue with them, whose accounts can be found in history books in the contexts of scholarly and intellectual debates of the time, but no one can accurately determine their number. And certainly these were people who, in the scholarly debates and discussions, did not appear to be of any lesser merit than those mentioned above. But neither the writings nor the edicts of these countless people have reached us, nor do we consider their loss to be a grave loss in the realm of Muslim thought. Thus, if we consider our understanding of the Faith to be adequate without accessing the works of Imam Auza'i, Dawood Zahiri or Tabari, there is no reason why we should have reservations about adopting the same attitude towards Abu Hanifa, Shafei, Ibn Hanbal and others like them, and we should think that without drawing on their knowledge our understanding of the Faith would remain inadequate and incomplete.

#### THE FOUR IMAMS: JURISPRUDENCE VERSUS REVELATION

Belief in the four imams is purely a product of history. A tyrannical history that is contemporaneous with the period of Muslim decline. After jurisprudence attained the status of functional revelation, the common Muslims had no other option open to them except seeking help from some contemporary jurist to organize and

conduct their religious life. And then, in the later years, when some schools, either because of their disciples or some political patrons, began to attain general acceptability, it spurred mutual disputes and rivalry among the supporters of different schools. Soon this rivalry took the form of scholarly disputes and open confrontation. To prove the superiority of their own schools, the jurisprudence did not simply depend on knowledge, but tried to enlist the support of the political establishment and public support through propaganda. The result was— the scholars of one school mounted blistering attacks on other schools. If in any city a jurist arrived from outside, the local jurists did not allow him any scope to propagate his view. They would deluge him with irrelevant questions that were intended to show the visiting jurist in poor light. In this climate of mutual conflict among Islamic scholars, it was not surprising that their followers would come to blows to settle scores with one another.<sup>22</sup>

The factionalism spearheaded by different juristic schools vitiated the atmosphere in the Muslim society. One school of jurist considered it their religious duty to declare members of the other schools as kafirs. Such pronouncements were made against one another from the minarets of mosques.<sup>23</sup> It reached such an extent that sometimes such confrontations would turn bloody, leading to the death of many people. One can have some idea about the gravity of the situation from the fact that Muhammad bin Ahmad who was an extraordinarily learned scholar among the *mu'tazelites* could not come out of his house for a period of fifty years because of his disagreements with others in matters of beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

In the sixth century hijra, Baghdad and Damascus had gained considerable notoriety because of these bickering among various juristic schools. Every other day one would hear of these squabbles between the Hanafites, the Shafeites and the Hanbalites. For the Islamic scholars, Faith had now been reduced to juristic squabbling which they were not ready to give up. This state of affairs in the Muslim world, in the coming years, invited the more ambitious enemies of Islam to deal a severe blow to it. The upshot was – the followers of the last prophet Muhammad who claimed to have one God, one Prophet and one Book were now divided into countless camps of imams on the basis of jurisprudential preferences, and thus became the cause of their own disarray and decline. The irony is that rather than recognizing the gravity of this situation, each faction insisted on its infallibility and stuck to the claim that the key to the understanding of the Faith was held by them and no one else.

For the publicity and promotion of particular schools it was now necessary that the ruling establishment endorsed one specific school and selected it for its patronage.

The promotion and prominence of the Hanafites and the Malekites owed largely to the political patronage extended to them.<sup>25</sup> It is said that in one city and at one time the followers of different imams remained so spiritedly engaged in religious disputes and hairsplitting that people always lived under fear of civil war because of such factionalism.<sup>26</sup> In 225 hijra, Malik Al-Zahir Baibars Bandoqdari, the ruler of Egypt, got fed up with these daily squabbles and appointed judges (*qadis*) from all the four prominent schools so that the followers of the four imams could follow the juristic decision according to their own preferences. In the later years, this step taken by Emperor Baibars purely for removing mutual disaffections facilitated these factions to gain their individual identity. One consequence of according recognition to the four schools of jurisprudence by the ruling establishment was that other lesser-known schools gradually disappeared from the scene.

The decision of sultan Baibars was not the decision of the central Caliphate of the time, nor the selection of these four schools was done on the basis of scholarly parameters. That is why for a long time, the concept of the four imams was taken to be a casual one. In the cities of the Muslim world people continued to follow more than four schools of jurisprudence. In the eighth century hijra, Ibn Batuta had recorded to have witnessed the performance of salah according to the ways of as many as thirteen imams in a single mosque in Damascus.<sup>27</sup> The concept of the four imams got formal endorsement only when Sultan Farah bin Barqooq, in the beginning of the ninth century Baibars, approved the performance of salah in Ka'ba according to the ways of the four imams. This endorsement of the ways of the four schools allowed them to gain a permanent status in the Muslim world.

Whether it was Baibars or Barqooq, none of them had any standing among Muslims in matters of Faith. Sultan Barqooq was even declared by some historians as *ashar-rul-mulook*, the worst of all tyrants.<sup>28</sup> However, despite their dubious status in matters of Faith, their decisions had led in later years to the canonization of the four imams. Perhaps, one significant reason for this was that the way mutual squabbles and conflicts had riven the Muslim society, and the way they led to a state of – كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ, it was considered imperative that the possibility of the emergence of a fifth imam must be stopped by any means. In the ninth and tenth century hijra, the declaration that 'the doors to ijtiḥad have been closed' should be seen against this background. In other words, even those who felt themselves to be outside the folds of the four schools, willy nilly, were compelled to take refuge in any one of them. The latter-day scholars of Islam had no other option open to them except remaining mute

witnesses to the slow death of intellectual enquiry within the confines of jurisprudence. Abu Zar'a says:

One day I asked my mentor Shaikh Bilqini as to what stopped Shaikh Taqiuddin Subki from undertaking *ijtihad*.... In the beginning he was disinclined to answer. At this I said that in my opinion it was due to the political positions that were earmarked for the jurists of the four schools. If anyone dared to go beyond the confines of *taqlid*, he would not get anything. He would be deprived of any position in the court. The common people would stop approaching him for edicts and brand him as an 'innovator' (*bida'ti*). (Abu Zar'a says that) hearing this Imam Bilqini smiled and agreed with me.<sup>29</sup>

The method and formula of *taqlid* that was resorted to for removing theological confusion and mutual confrontations among Muslims became, in the later years, the cause of a new conflict. However accurate the diagnosis of a disease, if the right antidote is not applied for its remedy, we cannot expect the desired result. As a temporary measure, the declaration of *taqlid* as a valid method led to a lessening of conflicts to some extent, and the possibility of the emergence of a fifth or a sixth imam was also averted. However, in a way this measure put the seal of approval on the juristic speculations and mutual recriminations of the four imams and their disciples for all times to come. The interminable debates and discussions generated by them on issues of Faith gathered more heat in the following years, and today, even after many centuries, they are nowhere any closer to resolution than before. Gradually, these juristic speculations and hair-splitting were taken to be an inalienable part of the Islamic thought structure, nay, a part of the Faith itself. Under such circumstances, if any concerned individual wanted to raise his voice of opposition against the mutual recriminations by the jurists and their followers, he simply contented himself by uttering the platitude that it was not in the interest of unity of thought in the Ummah that such recriminating debates should be continued on ancillary issues. Some farsighted scholars wrote articles on the necessity of adopting a moderate attitude on issues of jurisprudence. Some other concerned figures tried to establish a kind of synthesis among the four juristic schools.<sup>30</sup> However, all such efforts did not bear any fruit for the simple reason that they were trying to redress the deviation in the Islamic thought through the same means by which it had entered in the first place. In their unconscious mind, the sacred status of the four imams had had such a strong hold that, despite the disastrous consequences of juristic debates, they were not ready to

think beyond the framework established by jurisprudence. At the most, they could condemn juristic conflicts on ancillary issues, but were not ready to declare them as worthless additions to religious thought or 'innovations' (*bid'at*). The belief in the four imams had become an inevitable part of the unconscious mind so that they declared them to be from Allah.<sup>31</sup> The result was that in the coming years the longing to get out of the endless cycle of Pharisee-like conflicts and every effort to break the chains of *taqlid* was bound to fail because the captives had now fallen in love with their chains.

In the eighth and ninth century hijra, the structure of belief brought to the fore by the four imams further consolidated itself because the people who were then occupying the position of power had no clear idea of Islam in their minds. The realms of religious and worldly activities had become separate. The ruling class abided by the decisions of the ulema in religious affairs and thus, both the religious and political powers combined to keep the hold of the juristic Islam on the Muslim society. Acceptance of the four imams by the ruling establishment and allowing the ways of the four imams inside the Ka'ba, as we have mentioned earlier, from the beginning of the ninth century hijra, are instances to the point. There is no doubt that in the coming years these steps prevented other smaller juristic camps to emerge, apart from those of the four imams. On the other hand, this temporary compromise changed the entire complexion of Muslim thought in the coming years. In other words, the measure that was undertaken to resolve conflicts became the cause of new conflicts in the Muslim society.

As the four jurisprudent-imams gained recognition and political patronage, the term 'four imams' almost acquired the status of an article of Faith in later years. As a matter of fact, in its initial stages when jurisprudence was simply a reference point for scholarly activities like teaching and learning and it was firmly within the grip of Faith, its status was only that of a scholarly pursuit that articulated different points of view. The efforts to harmonise the multifarious manifestations of the Faith with the basic Islamic framework were indicative of a stable and peaceful society where assemblies of teaching and learning were held in a spirit of catholicity. This is the reason why in the first and the second centuries no statement by a jurisprudent was adduced as proof, nor was it considered necessary to write edicts within the narrow confines of a particular school of jurisprudence. The jurisprudence at that time operated within the limits set by the Faith. According to the investigations carried out by Shah Waliullah, before the first century hijra, people did not abide by the ways of any particular juristic school.<sup>32</sup> Even the leading jurisprudents of the time did not suffer from the delusion that whatever they produced after their juristic deductions and speculations had, in any way, extracted the whole essence of the Book and the sunnah. Then the books of



jurisprudence did not have the status of functional revelation. This is the reason why Imam Malik had strongly rejected the suggestion by the caliph of the time that, to remove the conflicts on matters of jurisprudence, his *Muatta* should be adopted as the official version of jurisprudence. At that time, the study of jurisprudence was treated as an individual effort in the way of Faith whose main objective was scholarly, not interpretive. It certainly had the standing of individual scholarship but not that of a school of thought. Then, the assemblies of jurists were like educational institutions where each person acquired knowledge according to his own capacity. To participate in such assemblies or enter this institution one did not have to formally adopt any particular school of thought.<sup>33</sup> The honorific like Hanafi, Shafei, Maliki, Auza'i did not mean anything more than the fact that the person concerned had acquired knowledge under these great scholars or their well-known disciples, just as, nowadays, we find people using honorific like Azhari, Madani, Qasmi, Nadvi and so on, that are appended to the students' name and that change with the change of institutions where they have studied. Thus, it was possible for one and the same person to be a Hanafite, a Shafeite and a Malikite at the same time. Imam Shafei himself was the best example of this phenomenon who was both Hanafi and Maliki. However, after the vogue of the term 'four imams' these names began to be understood as indicating not academic affiliations but allegiance to a particular juristic school, and slowly this assumed the dimension of a part of the Faith in Islamic thought.<sup>34</sup> So much so that in the later years this belief in the four imams grew so strong that academically it was not possible for anyone to receive training from more than one jurist. The juristic identity became so rigid that if one changed one's allegiance from Hanafi to Shafei school he was declared to be deserving of punishment in the books of jurisprudence.<sup>35</sup> When some people changed their allegiance from Hanafi to Shafei school, the jurists declared that they had lost their *iman* and that their evidence would not be accepted in a court of law.<sup>36</sup> Some jurists went still further and declared – لو كان لي أمر فوضعت على الحنابلة جزية<sup>37</sup> –

Having made the four imams a part of the Faith, it was now necessary that their agreements on matters of jurisprudence should be declared as the genuine expression of Islamic thought. The unending cycle of conflicts that had been raging among the imams and their disciples had in fact crept into Islamic thought through history. If the Qur'an was used as a guide it could have been possible to get out of the morass of conflicts and confrontations. But those who had already made the four imams a part of their Faith had no such inclination to seek guidance from the Qur'an. According to them, to think outside the parameters set by jurisprudence amounted to heresy, and

the people indulging in such thought could be declared to be outside the fold of Islam. Victims of their own misconceptions, they openly expressed the view that *ijtihad* was not possible in matters of basic principles. According to some Islamic scholars, the doors of *ijtihad* had already closed years earlier. The current situation was not suitable for it.<sup>38</sup> A group of Muslim scholars that includes such renowned names in the field as Ibn Hajar Asqalani, Jalaluddin Sayuti, Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi and Mulla Ali Qari stipulate the condition of the advent of the Messiah and the appearance of Mahdi for the emergence of the absolute mujtahid.<sup>39</sup> Even those who complain about the invisible mujtahid consider it impermissible to violate the rigid limits put up by jurisprudence. Even the great intellects were somehow so fascinated by the so-called sacred status of the first three centuries of Islam that even a rebellious scholar like Ibn Taimiyah could not totally escape the general climate of imitating the predecessors.<sup>40</sup> When the misconceptions generated by human thought acquired the state of belief, it was not only that any possibility of critiquing the four imams was lost, but that human speculations and inferences and the conflicts arising out of that also acquired a kind of halo around them. The moderate and peaceable people also began to advocate the view that the mutually conflicting and contradictory views of the four imams were equally reliable, and that the contradiction in thought was endorsed by the Books and the sunnah. It was also said that as all these views emanated from different sayings of the Prophet and reports, such contradictions could be traced back to the Prophet's Companions.<sup>41</sup> Traditions such as – أصحابي كلهم عدول – and – الصحابة كالنجوم – were resorted to in order to accord respectability to juristic differences.<sup>42</sup> Thus, aspersions were cast even on the Prophet's Companions and their supposed disagreements were alluded to in an effort to provide credibility to the four imams and justify their claims. In the coming years, the reputed scholars who emerged in these four schools of jurisprudence concentrated their efforts in propagating the ideology of their respective schools through newer interpretations of the sayings and the reports and their compilations, rather than taking a critical look at their own schools. The study of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions was undertaken from the limited perspective of proving the superiority of their own schools and the inferiority of the rival schools. When the sayings of the Prophet's Companions began to be excavated to justify the differences among the different schools of jurisprudence, not only that differences cropped up regarding an uninterrupted means of worship like *salah*, but also that a definitive and immutable document like the Qur'an also could not escape this scourge. The fabricators brought up this allegation against one of the most revered of the Prophet's Companions like Abdullah bin Mas'ud that he did not consider 'surah Naas' and

'surah Falaq' (muawwizatain) to be part of the Qur'an, and that the presence of these surahs in the Qur'an today is due to the consensus arrived at by the Prophet's Companions. These unreliable reports were exploited through the pretext of 'consensus' which is an accepted principle of jurisprudence. Very few people paid attention to the fact that the immortal document Qur'an itself may come under the firing line of the hypothetical principles and hypothetical examples, and that along with the Qur'an the very existence of the Islamic Faith would be suspect. One great harm caused by the canonization of the four imams and according respectability to their disputes was that the misconceptions about the Muslims of the earlier age that had crept into the Islamic thought through history, could not be denied on the basis of history.

Slowly and gradually, the term 'four imams' acquired a permanent status in the Islamic thought. Some great jurists declared that those outside the folds of the four imams would be considered as committing *bid'at* (innovation) and deserving of hell fire.<sup>43</sup> The four jurists who could, at best, be designated as milestones in our intellectual history, were considered as the inevitable extension of the Revelation. Those who wanted to treat history to be the Faith itself and who insisted on treating human judgements on the same footing as the Revelation, in fact, adopted all available means of manipulation that they considered necessary to give history a sacred status. Reports attributed to the Prophet were fabricated to provide validation to the emergence of jurists and regard their juristic thinking as part of the Islamic thought. When the followers of different schools of jurisprudence regard their own school as the only means of understanding the Faith, and regard it their religious duty to prove the unreliability of other schools, then the need arises for fabricated reports and sacred dreams. Some attributed the following report to the Prophet: *سيكون في أمي* *رجل أبوحنيفة هو سراج أمي*,<sup>44</sup> Such traditions, on the one hand, presented Abu Hanifa as an essential part of the Faith; on the other, they also strengthened the belief that the emergence of the four imams was part of a well-thought-out divine scheme, without which a proper understanding of the Faith or practising it is not possible. Such dreams were described as suggested that to Allah Abu Hanifa's stature were the highest, then Abu Yusuf's, and then Imam Ahmad's.<sup>45</sup> Incredible and exaggerated reports were fabricated to enhance the stature of the jurists whose objective was to prove them to be invested with such capabilities that were supra human, that they possessed such powers as could be had only by those who were appointed by Allah for a specific purpose.<sup>46</sup> The logical deductions and inferences by the jurists were said to be only an extension of the method adopted by the Prophet and his Companions. It was claimed that Abu Hanifa had inherited knowledge from the Prophet as his chain of

teachers somehow can be traced to the Prophet himself. It was related that Abu Hanifa learnt it from Hammad who learnt it from Alqama who was a disciple of Abdullah bin Mas'ud, a distinguished companion of the Prophet. Some also asserted that the Hanafite jurisprudence is not the result of the efforts by a single person, but that the best talents of the time were engaged in its compilation and editing. Such a collective endeavour should be treated as an immortal reference for the successors. We do not know whether those who endeavoured to show Abu Hanifa as the leader of the assembly of jurists were themselves aware of the juristic history of the Israelites and were influenced by the detailed record of their juristic assemblies. These details, in practice, led to a situation similar to the one that obtained in the case of the Israeli jurisprudence, i.e., Talmud, which was given a sacred status by the Israelites. The common Muslims fell victims to a similar phenomenon in the context of the four imams. Although there were instances of opposition recorded in history against the juristic assemblies of Abu Hanifa<sup>47</sup> but those who were bent upon regarding the Predecessors to have been appointed by Allah's Will would never dream of scrutinising or interrogating history. Thus, the efforts to lend credibility to the four jurists through fabricated traditions, sacred history and revelatory dreams succeeded to a large extent. It became also possible for the latter-day jurists, through the precedent established by the four imams to interpret the Faith and maintain a liaison between Allah and human beings. Who knew that a stray decision by Emperor Baibars and a local effort by him to put an end to the juristic conflicts would, in the coming years, acquire the dimension of an inevitable reference point in Islamic thought? And thus the Faith that had come to put an end to the institution of the clergy gradually made room within it for the spiritual leadership of the four imams. The sapling planted in the garden of Islamic thought in the form of the four imams gradually spread its branches and paved the way for the intrusion of accretions and spurious knowledge in Muslim thinking.

#### **PRINCIPLES OF JURISTIC SPECULATION AND ABROGATION OF REVELATION**

During the Prophet's period, the only source of shariah was the Qur'an. This was the sole Book that determined the direction of the individual and collective life of Muslims. The Prophet himself was bound to follow the Book. His status was that of the interpreter of shariah, not that of its maker.<sup>48</sup> Although the Prophet's personality seemed to have an existence independent of the Qur'an, but the reality was that the greater part of his life emanated from the Qur'an rather than the sources outside it. In

other words, in order to achieve the Qur'anic objective, all the efforts of the Prophet sought guidance from the Revelation. So much so that even after his death, as long as the healthy concept of history remained intact in the Muslim mind, this Book occupied a central place in search of the Prophetic model. However, in later years, under the impact of the concept of authenticated history when the reports and practices were taken to be on a par with the sunnah, it paved the way for the emergence of new sources of shariah outside the Qur'an.

In the foregoing pages, we have already drawn attention to the fact that how in the earlier centuries, in the context of the sunnah as shariah, two groups among the Muslim thinkers were formed, namely, *ahl al-raai* and *ahl al-Hadith*. This was the period when the entire Muslim society was in the throes of an intellectual upheaval. If, on the one hand, the assemblies of traditionists and jurists were thriving and the trend of memorising reports and utterances was getting a new fillip, on the other, Muslim thoughts were being influenced by strange philosophies and alien ideas. In fact, it was due to the interference of alien ideas that in the later years the debate about the sunnah being accepted as sources of shariah was extended to incorporate both consensus and inference (*qiyas*). Thus, the Ummah that, at the time of the Prophet, considered the Qur'an to be sufficient for its guidance, and whose caliphs accepted the centrality of the Book by asserting – 'For us, Allah's Book is sufficient' (حسبنا كتاب الله), now the same society was split down the middle on the subject of the sources of the shariah.

In the history of Muslim thinking, the credit of devising the 'four principles' goes to such a person who was certainly a product of our culture, but as far as his mental make-up was concerned, he was considered to be more a follower of the Greek rationalism rather than the Qur'anic way of life and whom the scholars of Islam also take to be a 'religious scholar' in the specific idiom of jurisprudence. It was Wasil bin Ata (80-131 hijra), rightly regarded by Muslims as the founder of scholastic theology who, for the first time, posited four principles to determine the Truth. He asserted that there are four ways to identify the truth: The *Qur'an natiq* (explicit rulings in the Qur'an), *Hadith muttafiq alaihi* (Hadiths on which there is no disagreement), consensus of the Ummah and intellect or proof (in the sense of inference or *qiyas*). This method of identifying the truth left a deep impact on Muslim thinking in later years. This was also because, initially, there was no watertight division or distinction between the traditionists and the scholastics. More often than not, the same individual exhibited overlapping tendencies, and the method of interpretation and elucidation adopted by one influenced the other. In the compilation of the jurisprudence itself, the

scholastic mind played a key role in the choice of the terms, search for the *ratio legis*, search for the precedents and determining the 'general' and the 'specific'. Thus, there was no reason why these scholastic debates should not have impacted upon the juristic intellects of the time. It is said that the debate about the 'general' and the 'specific' in Qur'anic verses was also initiated by Wasil.<sup>49</sup>

The method adopted by the scholastics in interpretation and elucidation later grew into a distinct school of thought, which, for a long time, was condemned as *tahreek-e i'tizal*. Nevertheless, it left its deep impact on Islamic thought in its initial stages. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the emergence of juristic intellect in Islam was largely due to the influence of the scholastic school, even though right from the beginning, the thinking of the scholastics has remained a controversial subject in Islam. The jurisprudents and traditionists have continued to term it as aberration in thinking and some Islamic scholars have forbidden the acquisition of this knowledge,<sup>50</sup> and some have issued edicts in favor of humiliating the scholastics in public.<sup>51</sup> Despite all this, it cannot be denied that the scholastic thought had, for a long time, continued to have its impact on Muslim thought, directly or indirectly. To identify the fault lines in the scholastic school of thought and to defeat the scholastics, their rivals studied this school of thought carefully and deeply and took help from their method of argument in their own defense. There is a long list of Islamic scholars – from Abu Hanifa to Ghazali, who first took interest in scholastic theology, learnt many things from its method of interpretation, were influenced by it, and then when the harmful effect of this process of interpretation and its inconclusiveness became clearer in their minds, they not only repented for having accepted it at one stage but also declared its acquisition to be an aberration in Islamic thought. However, despite all the condemnation and contradiction of this movement (*tahreek-e i'tizal*), they could not wholly dismiss it from their minds and hearts. In the evolution and compilation of jurisprudence, one can often feel the presence of this alien thought. In the Qur'anic law, when the jurisprudent is seen to be engaged in the quest of إشارات النص, اقتضاء النص and دلالة النص or when he seems to think it necessary to add the list of undesirable acts (*makroohat*) to the list of forbidden acts (*muharrimat*) stipulated by the Qur'an, or when he discusses about the obligatory duties (*fardh, wajib*), or when he wants to understand and explain to others different categories of prayer or worship as *fardh, wajib, sunnah* and *nafil*, in all these acts he seems to be under the influence of scholastic thought. Ironically, the same person issues edicts against the supporters of this school of thought, and that he does not consider them even reliable Muslims in the framework of his jurisprudence.

Wasil's 'four principles' that are basically directed at giving the Qur'an and authenticated sunnah the status of a general standard and supplement it through rational thinking and inferences do not, on the face of it, seem to indicate a serious aberration in thinking. The fact is that if the seminality and centrality of the Qur'an were maintained in the operation of these 'four principles', then there would have been very little possibility of the emergence of ancillary sources of the shariah. But it so happened that despite accepting the centrality of the Qur'an in principle, the position of Hadith got consolidated as the source of the shariah with reference to *wahi ghair matlu*. Then, apart from the Book and the authenticated sunnah, *qiyas* was also accepted, owing to the *Hadith ma'az*, as an independent source of shariah. Thus, when different sources of shariah outside the Qur'an began to emerge one after another, then those 'four principles' were given the status of juristic formulations by Shafeis Al-Risala. Though from the beginning, a section of Islamic scholars have always seen Hadith as the extension of the Qur'an (Shatibi has strongly advocated this school of thought in his *Al-Muafiqaat*) and some scholars have always seen the justification for *ijtihad* emanating from *Hadith ma'z* as basically the extension of the Qur'an and sunnah, because here *qiyas* and *ijtihad* operate within the paradigm set by the Qur'an, not outside it. But, despite all this care and caution, by Shafeis time these 'four principles' got such acceptability that they were taken as standard principles for the determination of the truth. Once the search for shariah principles outside the Qur'an gained currency then, apart from the sunnah, the consensus of the Ummah and inferences of *الراسخون في العلم* achieved a sacred status. Acceptance of history as an authentic source of the sunnah led, firstly, to the accommodation of different and conflicting interpretations; secondly, to validate consensus and inference, a greater need than before arose for historical references. The result was that in determining the Islamic sources of the shariah, the key position or centrality of the Qur'an could not be maintained. Apart from the utterances and practices, the consensus of the Ummah, *qiyas* and *jihad*, many other ancillary and arbitrary sources like *مصالح, استصلاح, استحسان* and *عرف و عادات, مرسله* and so on made their appearance as sources of the shariah. Who knew that Wasil's 'four principles' that, in his time, were seen merely as a philosophical stance and a rational attitude would, in the coming years, would become a key to the understanding of Islam through Shafei and without it any effort towards the search for the truth would not be considered fruitful or authentic?

To make a proper assessment of the aberration of thought that crept into Islamic thought through the 'four principles', it is necessary that we should see different dimensions of these principles in their proper perspective. Today, if the principles are

taken as the immortal sources of jurisprudence, and today if the new claimants of innovative thought also cannot dare to challenge its established position or do not realize the need for it, the reason for this is the fact that these people are not aware of its different aspects.

### THE QUR'AN

According to these 'four principles', the Qur'an comes first as the source of Islamic jurisprudence, which obviously leads one to believe that the Qur'an is the inevitable goal of all our juristic efforts, but the methods of interpretation and elucidation of the Qur'an that is in vogue among the famed jurists, give the lie to the above assertion. In the words of the famed Al-Sarkhasi:

اعلم بأن الكتاب هو القرآن المنزل على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم المكتوب في دفتي  
المصاحف المنقول إلينا على الأحرف السبعة نقلا متواترا<sup>52</sup>

i.e. 'It should be known that 'the Book' is the Qur'an that was revealed to the Prophet, and which is preserved within two covers, and that has reached us through a process of uninterrupted transmission in seven textual parallels.'

In other words, according to the jurists, 'the Book' is not the Qur'an that is preserved within two covers and that is accessible to all, high and low; rather, for them, the Qur'an is the book that was revealed in seven textual parallels. There are controversies, too, about different readings of this text, and the differences between word and meaning that have been recorded in the volumes of Prophetic sayings and practices. We could have dismissed the claim of Sarkhasi as the misguided thinking of an individual but the fact remains that in books of jurisprudence, one finds many instances of drawing inferences and laws from these fabricated readings of Qur'anic verses and the self-invented and controversial additions. Not only that, they have also been taken as the key to the understanding of the faith. That is why we cannot dismiss Sarkhasi's view as the deluded thinking of an otherwise reliable scholar of the Faith. Abu Hanifa, in the exposition of his jurisprudence has, time and again, valorized *qirat-e-shazzah* (unfamiliar reading), i.e., the readings by Abdullah bin Mas'ud have been assumed to be right and conducive to Islam. About these fabricated texts, Sarkhasi asserts categorically:

نحن اثبتنا بقراءة ابن مسعود كون تلك الزيادة قرآنا' وإنما جعلنا ذلك بمنزلة خبر رواه عن  
رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لعلمنا أنه ما قرأ إلا سماعا من رسول الله وخبره مقبول في  
وجوب العمل به<sup>53</sup>.



'We do not consider the additional words incorporated in Abdullah bin Mas'ud's reading to be the Qur'anic Text. Rather, we consider them to be his reports that he narrates from the Prophet. This is because we know that he has learnt these words directly from the Prophet ....'

The Hanafites are not alone in drawing juristic laws from the fabricated Qur'an and *qirat-e shaz*. Shafei who enjoys the status of the founder of juristic principles, also seems to have fallen a victim to this delusion in thinking about the Book. In him, too, we find the tendency to use the fabricated texts to draw juristic principles. Take, for instance, the case of foster brothers and sisters (*riza't*). Shafei is of the opinion that Allah has not determined a definite quantum of breast milk for foster sisters. In the Shafeite jurisprudence, the quantum of five gulps has been drawn from the report attributed to Ayisha, according to which the five gulps were once a part of the Qur'an. Both among the Shafeites and the Hanafites, the determination of five gulps for foster-sisters was, in fact, drawn from the fabricated verse of the fabricated Qur'anic Text which was wrongly attributed to Ayisha. Similarly, in the context of chopping right hands of thieves, both the schools have drawn on the fabricated verse – *فاقطعوا أيماهما* – attributed to Abdullah bin Mas'ud.<sup>54</sup> Many such examples can be cited that demonstrate that the jurists, instead of taking the Qur'an as the Book and awarding it a key position in their thought structure have given greater importance to the fabricated Qur'anic Text, references to which can be found in the volumes of the Prophetic utterances and practices. For instance, in the Qur'anic verse – *أَسْكِنُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ سَكَنْتُمْ مِنْ وَجْدِكُمْ* [65:6], for the divorcee, only the condition of residence has been stipulated. Abu Hanifa, depending on the reading of Abdullah bin Mas'ud – *وأنفقوا وعليهن من وجدكم*, has also stipulated the condition of maintenance along with residence. Similarly, among the infidels of Yemen, the condition of keeping three continuous fasts is said to be due to the reading of Abdullah bin Mas'ud, *فصيام ثلاثة أيام متتابعات*. We have already offered similar other examples in Chapter 3. The main objective of drawing attention to these instances is to demonstrate that for the jurists, the Book does not necessarily mean the Qur'an but those fabricated Qur'anic verses and readings are also taken to be part of the Book that was the product of the sick minds of the enemies of Islam and that does not have even the remotest connection with the Revelation revealed to the Prophet. As for the immortal source of the Revelation that we know as the Qur'an, each and every word of which is true beyond all doubts and suspicions, the reality is that instead of seeking light from this Book of Guidance, the jurists have effectively suspended it by creating unnecessary debates about the essence and

details, the abrogator and the abrogated, affirmative and negative, literal and metaphorical, and so on.

### SUNNAH

Sunnah in the sense of Hadith was an important tool for elucidation and interpretation. If the traditions and the practices of the Prophet were considered as an aid or source for the interpretation of the Qur'an, then certainly they had enough material to help in the process of understanding the Qur'an, but what happened was that the sunnah, Hadith and the model which had their distinct identity and specific importance were mixed up with one another. The result was that more than the importance in the context of interpretation, the reports and practices began to be used to derive Islamic laws, and in this way, the search for a source of the Islamic shariah outside the Qur'an began. There is no doubt about the fact that every action of the Prophet may be used as a proof in matters of the Faith and, in this sense, the sunnah does have the dimension of the shariah. However, to designate all the utterances attributed to the Prophet as the immortal source of sunnah was a dangerous trend that had far-reaching consequences. The conflicting and contradictory report about each action of the Prophet led to numerous disputes which, unaided by the crutches of jurisprudence, would have found their place in the trash can of history. The distortion in the Muslim thought was taking place in the context of sunnah through reports of all kinds. Jurisprudence accorded it the status of the proper shariah and through this canonization the distortion got a perpetual lease of life. In order to consolidate the shariah aspect of the sunnah in the sense of reports, such thoughts were brought to the fore that just as the Qur'anic verses used to be revealed to the Prophet, in the same way, the sunnah were also revealed through Gabriel. If the first of the kind was the 'manifest' Revelation (*wahi jali*), the second was no less than 'the hidden' Revelation (*wahi khafi*). If the former was *wahi matlu* (to be regularly recited), the latter was *wahi ghair matlu* (not meant for recitation). Since both were from Allah, and since the source and the medium of both were one and the same, then one of them could also stand abrogated by the other. This peculiar understanding of the sunnah that we have discussed in detail in the last chapter, accorded it much greater importance in drawing laws and regulations, than the Qur'an. The reason why we find so much difference among jurists on any issue was their excessive dependence on reports.

The practices and reports did not enjoy the status of the shariah during the time of the four venerated caliphs. The generation that asserted confidently – 'for us, Allah's Book is sufficient' – and considered it necessary to derive insights from the

information pertaining to the Prophet's period available on some issues, and if on some occasions we find instances of looking for precedents by the caliphs from the Prophet's life, it was only in the nature of past precedents and that is all. As a matter of fact, in every era, the caliphs felt it necessary to reorganise their principles according to the changing demands of the time. Omer had instituted many changes in the policies put in place at the time of the Prophet and Abu Bakr, as he thought it to be a natural process for the full realisation of the True Faith. At the time of the venerable caliphs, sunnah was a slowly evolving, just system of administration that changed its shape from time to time, though the soul of the Faith residing within remained intact.

Granting the sayings and practices the status of the source of shariah led to drastic consequences. First, a different source of shariah, outside the Revelation, came into existence, that had no definite or definitive status that went on increasing and extending its boundaries. On the same issue, different and contradictory utterances and practices alleged to have been made by the Prophet would be brought to the fore. There was no clear or genuine compilation of such reports, nor was there any possibility of any consensus of the Ummah on any such compilation. Then, it was a general perception that no single jurist could ever encompass the boundless ocean of Hadith. If someone got access to one Hadith, he could not get access to another. Under these circumstances, granting the status of shariah to Hadiths was bound to lead to anarchy in Islamic thought, intellectual confusion and ideological crisis. The inevitable consequence was – as a new source of the shariah, outside the Qur'an, came into existence, it plunged the entire Ummah headlong into a crisis.

As we have pointed out earlier, in the early period, Hadith did not mean only the statement of the Prophet; rather, it also incorporated the daily routine and practices of the Prophet. The sunnah of the Prophet was taken to mean the Prophetic model whose first source was the Qur'an and whose second important source was the manifest sunnah about which one entire generation stood testimony to another, and that passed from one generation to another, and no need was felt of any written evidence or any proof from any compilations of traditions of the Prophet. This is why, the earlier collections of Hadith appear more as recollections of the Prophet's time and the space that he breathed in. Muatta Imam Malik is ostensibly the most genuine collection of Hadiths. But here the Hadiths have been organized in their historical context where the utterances of the Prophet's Companions and their followers have got mixed up with those of the Prophet. However, when emphasis was laid on the shariah aspect of Hadiths and this distortion in the Islamic thought began to have a strong hold on the Muslim mind that, outside the Qur'an, the human interpretation of sunnah has the

dimension of the shariah, it gave a fillip to the search for the utterances of the Prophet. The organization of evidence assumed importance. However, it is to the leading traditionists of the third century that the credit goes for looking at the utterances and practices of the Prophet with the eyes of jurists, among whom the compilers of the canonical texts of *sehad sitta* deserve a special mention. In giving a shape to Islamic jurisprudence with the help of the practices, Bukhari gave space to the verses of the Qur'an in his chapters, but his disciple, Muslim, tried to compile such a text with the help of the utterances of the Prophet where, from an attitude of caution so that there should be nothing except the Prophet's utterances, omitted even the chapter headings. After this, the other traditionists of this period, among whom Ibn Maja, Abu Daud, Tirmizi and Nasei are the most prominent, have compiled such collections of jurisprudence of their own on the basis of sayings and practices where one notices the gradual disappearance of the earlier trend of writing Qur'anic verses as preamble to each chapter which Bukhari had considered essential.

Taking Hadith as yet another word for sunnah and making it a source of shariah has paved the way for the abrogation of the Qur'an more than its application. Even when the jurisprudence was emerging as a discipline, there was no dearth of people who were ready to accept Hadiths only when they were perceived to be helpful in the interpretation and elucidation of the Qur'an. But this stance did not gain much currency among the scholars of Hadiths. Shafei, in his *Kitab al-Umm* has alluded to this group in considerable details which, according to him, had summarily dismissed all Hadiths. The stance of this group was that no one had the right to make distinction between the acts and duties that have been declared by Allah to be obligatory by saying that some of them are 'general' while some others are 'specific' in their application, or that some acts are of an obligatory nature while some are in the nature of desirable acts (*istihbab*). Such juristic hair-splitting in the studies on Qur'an was only possible by giving undue credence to traditions. Shafei who exhibits an excessive predilection for reports, rather than reason and theological analysis, vehemently opposed any scrutiny about the rationale of a Hadith attributed to the Prophet. According to him, those who opine that only the Hadiths referring to those activities will be accepted for which there is validation in the Qur'an are also in a state of denial of the Hadiths. So much so that even those who refuse to accept the distinction between the 'general' and the 'specific', the 'abrogator' and the 'abrogated' are also, according to Shafei, in the wrong.<sup>55</sup> There have been disagreements among scholars of Islam from the very beginning about the status of sayings and practices as sources of shariah. In the history of Muslim thought one also finds different groups or schools who held different views on their concept of

history. Though the streams of thought prevalent among the three groups – *ahl al-raay*, *ahl al-kalam* and *ahl-al-Hadith* – often seemed to overlap, but one could clearly feel their independent undercurrents as well. If those belonging to the *ahl-al-Hadith* group are known for their excessive predilection for Hadiths and their independent status as sources of shariah, the *ahl al-raai* would rather like to depend on their understanding of the Faith to resolve issues rather than depending on weak reports, while according to the followers of the scholastic school, whether it is a Hadith or a judgment, it must pass the test of rationality and intelligence within the basic framework of Islam before being accepted as valid.

No group absolutely dismissed the Hadiths as a historical and interpretive tool; the disagreements were about their status as the sources of the shariah. Those who had excessive predilections for Hadiths and thought that without Hadiths one could not even determine the number of *raka'ts* (genuflexions) in the obligatory salah, were, in fact, victims of a terrible mix-up between Hadiths and uninterrupted sunnah. Shafei was the first scholar who coined terms to delimit and define the scope of these two categories, namely, Hadiths and uninterrupted sunnah. According to him, it is a discipline where evidence is culled from the Qur'an, unanimous Hadiths and the consensus of the Ummah. For example, he declares the validity of the four rak'ats of zuhr salah on this principle because, according to him, one finds unanimity among the Qur'an, reports and the consensus of the Ummah.<sup>56</sup> Because of this excessive insistence on Hadith and reports, a need for the refutation and validation of reports coming from different sources was felt. That is why new terms were coined in the study of the Hadith. Depending on their own object and insights, traditionists declared some Hadiths to be *sahih* (valid), some to be *hasan* (tolerable) and some to be *za'if* (feeble). The Hadiths collected by those belonging to the groups, *ahl al-raay* and *ahl al-Hadith* were not acceptable to each other. The Shias considered only those Hadiths reliable that came through the 'innocent imams' and the Kharejites considered only those Hadiths reliable that were recorded before the occurrence of political upheaval (*in 'iqad-e fitna*). On the other side, the *ahl al-Hadith* insisted on every report coming through just narrators, even if it was narrated by a single transmitter, that it should be considered as a source of the shariah. One group of jurists put forward the view that as the Hadiths were 'reports in meaning' (*rawayat bil-ma'ni*), in the formulation of the shariah, only the reports of those transmitters should be accepted who were capable of understanding and assessing the meaning of the words they were using. In other words, those who themselves possessed juristic intellect.<sup>57</sup> This wide variety of opinions about Hadiths gave birth to a wide range of juristic formulations. If the

Hanafites considered a particular Hadith applicable because of its wide reputation (mustafeedh) and based their juristic school on that, then the Shafeites uncovered the hidden weaknesses of the same Hadith and dismissed it altogether, while the Malikites rejected it as it ran counter to the practices of the people of Medina. The result was that the disagreements on reports, coming through jurisprudence, assumed a religious dimension, and thus through the sunnah we were propelled to a phase of history where the followers of the Qur'an were divided into different juristic camps.

### CONSENSUS

Like 'the Book' and the 'sunnah', consensus is also a term about which there are serious disagreements among jurists.<sup>58</sup> To accept consensus as evidence in shariah or take it as a source of shariah, the Qur'anic verse where the phrase, *sabil al-mumineen* occurs was presented,<sup>59</sup> and on the strength of this the supporters of consensus claim that Muslims should keep themselves in tune with mainstream thinking, i.e., 'سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ'. According to jurists, consensus is the outward manifestation of *sabil al-mumineen*. Who would refuse to align himself with *sabil al-mumineen*, but the question remains as to what is this *sabil al-mumineen*? It must be determined with the help of evidence from the Qur'an, but if there is approval for it available in the Qur'an, it would mean that there is no need for consensus at all.

Reports such as *رفع عن أمتي الخطأ والنسيان* and *يد الله على الجماعة*,<sup>60</sup> *لا تجمع أمتي على ضلالة*<sup>62</sup> paved the way for the acceptance of the majority view in the determination of Allah's Will. Some presented this axiom, with reference to Ibn Mas'ud that the thing that Muslims take to be good will be considered good by Allah, and that which they consider to be bad will be considered so by Allah.<sup>63</sup> Actually, on principle, the Will of Allah, as it is, should not need the support of the majority or the consensus of the Ummah for its corroboration. Then, the controversy still remained among the jurists about whether consensus meant the consensus of the entire Ummah, or the unanimous opinion of the Islamic scholars and mujtahids. Further, whether the consensus arrived at by scholars in one city will be equally valid for the people of the other cities as well? Some opined that only the consensus of the people of Medina could serve as evidence as it was the destination of immigrants and the culture of that city bore the imprint of the Prophet's personality.<sup>64</sup> Then some others opined that the consensus arrived at any other period, apart from that arrived at during the period of the Prophet's Companions could not be accepted as evidence.<sup>65</sup> Some scholars totally dismissed consensus as evidence in shariah. They felt that to manufacture consensus on any issue was an idle thought,<sup>66</sup> because it had never happened in history, nor did we

ever have the means to determine whether the scholars of different nooks and corners of the Muslim world have arrived at a consensus on a specific issue. To get round this knotty problem, some divided consensus into two kinds, verbal and silent, and started spreading the view that if on any particular issue, the Islamic scholars do not make their disagreements known, then it should be treated as silent consensus among them. Despite all such subterfuges, no unanimity could be arrived at regarding the status of consensus as evidence in shariah.<sup>67</sup> Some Islamic scholars declared consensus to be the result only of Allah's power, and argued that who knows when Allah, without any evidence, would direct the majority of the Ummah to the true path?<sup>68</sup> The Shias raised the objection that any consensus, unless endorsed by one of the 'innocent imams' could not be considered valid.<sup>69</sup> Thus, ostensibly, the plan of jurists to establish a source of the shariah, outside the Qur'an, and on the basis of majority opinion, ran into trouble and it could never reach any resolution. Nevertheless, in actual practice, jurists did manipulate this device of consensus to give respectability to their own ideas and thoughts.<sup>70</sup>

Shafei was a zealous enthusiast in using consensus as evidence for shariah. However, when he found that his opponents were using the same weapon, his enthusiasm about the consensus waned and he changed his position on it. He was compelled to declare that consensus could not be applied to any other issue except for *salah*, *zakat* and the things that are strictly forbidden (*muharrimat*). As for the other issue, i.e., whether the consensus arrived at on any subject by the jurists of different cities could be cited as evidence of the shariah, Shafei said that in his time the people occupying the position of power in most of the cities belonged to the scholastic school.<sup>71</sup> To find a way around this difficulty Shafei treated the statement of the Predecessors about which there was no controversy among the scholars as consensus, and took them as evidence in matters of the Faith. Since the time of Shafei to our present day, consensus has always been used by the Islamic scholars as a potent weapon. Whoever wanted to silence his opponents used this weapon to declare the opponents to be outside the mainstream (سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ), and thus outside the fold of the Ummah. Thus, for the acts for which no evidence could be drawn either from the Book or the sunnah, in those spheres the jurists made false claims through the manipulation of this device (i.e., consensus).

The greatest harm caused due to the use of consensus as evidence for shariah was that no critical attitude could be adopted towards the distortion in thought that had crept into Islamic thinking in different periods. Through their continuous currency, these alien thoughts were gradually being familiarized. For example, the Ummah could

not yet free itself from all the distortions in thought that found place in the margins of Qur'anic exegeses through reports. On the contrary, every new day added to this unbearable burden of fabricated consensus and acceptance (*qabool*), and thus the scare of consensus totally dominated our imitative minds. Many such instances can be presented from jurisprudence where, in the name of consensus, the deviant thoughts of a particular period was taken to be the real Faith. The jurists very well knew that their particular understanding of the Faith was not consistent with the conceptual framework presented by the Qur'an. But the fear of rising against the cumulative consensus of the Ummah, gathered through centuries, prevented them from revisiting the issues and thinking anew about them. For example, it is said that there is no dispute within the Ummah as to death penalty for a fornicator by stoning him/her to death. The evidence that is presented from the Qur'an in support of this is too facile and would make the Qur'an itself unreliable.<sup>72</sup> But the jurists insisted that they would not rethink on the issue even if doubts were cast on the authenticity of the Qur'an itself. Similarly, the report related to the statement – لا وصية لوارث – that effectively abrogated the Qur'anic verse on inheritance is regarded to be a matter of common consensus among the jurists. All juristic decisions are taken on the basis of this statement, not on the basis of the relevant Qur'anic verse.<sup>73</sup> Almost similar is the case with the verse related to *kilala*. All jurists and exegetes take the phrase, وله أخ أو أخت to mean foster brothers and sisters. It is stated that the Ummah has already reached a consensus on it. The fabricated text by Ubai bin Ka'b has been made the basis of this consensus where, according to the transmitter, the additional phrase of 'min umm' was present at the end of 'أخ أو أخت' (brother or sister) which is not available in the current version of the Qur'an.<sup>74</sup> One interesting example of how consensus has been manipulated is provided by the phenomenon of triple talaq which is in direct contravention of the Qur'anic statement – (divorce is twice) الطلاق مرتان. But it is given out that the Islamic scholars have reached a consensus about this too. Fabricated reports and manufactured sunnah have not only credited Omer with initiating the trend of triple talaq, but that the jurists have complicated this issue so much by their hair-splitting on different kinds of talaq that the issue now seems beyond any kind of resolution. The real problem is that for fear of the consensus of the Ummah we do not dare to undertake a radical rethinking on the issue.

### QIYAS

The status of the *qiyas* as an ancillary source of shariah, its definition and acceptability has remained a subject of raging controversy among the jurists.



Qiyas has played a crucial role in according a kind of sacredness to deviant thoughts and heightening disagreements on juristic issues among the jurists.<sup>75</sup> The Shia imams and Dawood Zahiri<sup>76</sup> rejected it altogether as an evidence of shariah. Ahmad Hanbal gives precedence to interrupted Hadith or weak Hadith to *qiyas*.<sup>77</sup> Malik exercises extreme caution in its application. However, to Shafei, *qiyas* is nothing less than a kind of *ijtihad* whose roots could be found in the Book, the sunnah and the consensus. Probably, that is the reason why he does not consider a view acceptable if it is independent of the framework of Islam and stands merely on the strength of *qiyas*. But some jurists believe that a view (*ra'ay*) is just another name for *qiyas*; however, those who are competent to express views on Islamic laws (*ashaab al-ra'ay*) reflect and work within the basic framework of Islam, that is why Shafei considered *ra'ai* (analogical reasoning) more reliable than *istihsan*. Whatever he wrote in *Kitab Al-Umm* in refutation of *istihsan* would make it clear that *qiyas* works within the framework of *raai* and *ijtihad* whereas *istihsan* does not consider it necessary to limit itself within any such framework. Shafei has taken strong exception to this statement by Imam Muhammad that 'I undertake *istihsan* and give up *qiyas*', and that Abu Hanifa undertook to apply *qiyas* and gave up *istihsan*. It must be said, however, that in the later periods, *istihsan* was seen as a supplement to *qiyas* only. Nevertheless, the way Shafei lambasted *istihsan* and advocated *qiyas* offering strong arguments in its favor, makes it clear that in his period terms like *qiyas*, *ra'ay* and *ijtihad* were used more or less synonymously which were taken to be methods of research and reflections within the basic framework of the Faith. Only in the later periods, when jurists focused their attention mainly on the verses of commandments, and ignored the verses of the Qur'an that dealt with other issues, then neither the basic framework existed nor the former tools of reflection and research. Under the circumstances, *qiyas* meant only looking for analogy and earlier precedents. It was considered synonymous with the search for the causes and the *ratio legis*.

The search for *ratio legis* in the *nass* (Qur'anic text) involves the direction in which an individual's mind works rather than reading the text in a particular context. As it had already been accepted, on principle, that the scope of commandments was determined not only by the letters in the text but also the style in which it was written. For a proper appreciation of *nass* it was required that one should have a deep knowledge of the language, its finer points and rhetorical devices. That is why the scholars, depending on their objective, tried their best to read their own intellectual and attitudinal preferences in the *nass*. The result was that the same text was made to yield different meanings to different persons. From one verse of commandment, many

other subsidiary commands were drawn, and every effort to synthesize or co-relate these commandments led to further conflicts and disagreements. For example, the Qur'anic verse – لَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٌّ – has been interpreted by jurists at different levels of style. Some said that this is a mere turn of phrase the real import of which is that parents must be protected from all kinds of pain and anguish. An interminable debate among jurists took place on this issue: whether inflicting suffering on them or killing them for political reasons before the exclamation 'uff' escaped from their lips would amount to a violation of – لَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٌّ – etc. etc. When the jurists began to read the Book of Guidance as the Book of Laws, it was natural that such legal hair-splitting would take place.<sup>78</sup> Since, through *qiyas*, people were trying to read the Qur'an as the Book of Law and all their attention was focused on searching for the *ratio legis* in the verses of commandment to draw laws for similar activities, this method of interpretation and elucidation acquired a seminal role in the juristic framework.

To start with, the scope of *qiyas* was in the nature of a branch sprouting from a trunk. The branch, as Ghazali pointed out, could sprout only when there is a tree.<sup>79</sup> This is the reason why Shafei who did not consider it permissible to think and reflect beyond the framework of sayings and practices, and who had strongly objected to this very basis of *istihsan*, and was an advocate of the attitude that looked for the similitude of *nass* in the activities that were against *nass*. Shafei, apparently to confine *qiyas* within the framework of Islam, took utmost care and made it subservient to the Book, the sunnah and the consensus. However, in later years, the same restrictions blocked the way for *qiyas*. Firstly, as a result of declaring sunnah (in the sense of Hadith) as the source of shariah the deviant thoughts coming through reports led the juristic intellects away from the basic framework of Revelation. On the other hand, the jurists continued to believe that the roots of their inferences (*qiyas*) lay deeply buried in the Qur'an, and if not in the Qur'an then certainly in the sunnah. Secondly, consensus that was introduced as an ancillary evidence of shariah, was also accepted as the basis for *qiyas*. We will try to explain these two points through illustrations. A report was attributed to the Prophet according to which he forbade his followers to pay more in the exchange of gold for gold, silver for silver, date fruit for date fruit, and wheat for wheat. According to this tradition, any excess payment in such exchanges will be considered as usury or interest. The Shafeite school drew two formulations from this report: first, the things which came under the category of foodstuff and second, those things that could be measured in weight. On the basis of these two formulations, the Shafeites inferred that as far as foodstuff is concerned, people are not allowed to

undertake unequal exchange, as any such exchange will be treated as interest.<sup>80</sup> Apart from drawing these formulations, the jurists did not take the trouble to reflect on the fact as to what kind of trade entails the exchange of the same kind of goods. How can the seller or the buyer be benefited by such an unrealistic transaction? Rather than reflecting on the nature of the report and its implications we went on complicating the issue further merely giving a free rein to our *qiyas*. In other words, *qiyas* that had intellect and innovative thoughts (*ijtihad*) as their reference points, reached a blind alley because of its excessive dependence on reports. Almost similar was the consequence that followed because of making consensus the basis of *qiyas*. Consensus which basically implies general intellect of the people and which, at best, can be taken as a branch of collective thinking on the Book and the sunnah. Despite all its importance, it cannot be said to be so qualified as to serve as the basis of *qiyas*, or that it can be given a sacred status with reference to the utterances of the Predecessors. In making *qiyas* subservient to consensus, Shafei probably intended that the new efforts at interpretation and thinking should be kept within the framework of Islam. But what happened was that when jurists failed to receive guidance from the Book and the sunnah in their inferential efforts, they considered the thoughts of the Predecessors sufficient for their guidance. As for the consensus, we have already made it clear that, in the words of Shafei, it had not yet been applied to any other sphere except for salah, fasting (*saum*) and the things that are strictly forbidden; nor should the consensus, by its very definition, be applied to any other sphere. At best, it should be taken as a psychological or ideological stance and that is all. However, the phenomenon of taking the utterances of the Predecessors and the inferential formulations (*istinbat*) of old jurists to be the same as consensus led to another complication which was that through *qiyas* not only the doors to new possibilities were not opened but the earlier thoughts and ideas stood guard like a rock to prevent any such possibility. For example, the issue of giving responsibility to the brother of a girl for her marriage in the absence of the father, and considering him as the guardian or *wali* (as in the Hanafite school of thought) has not been derived from any Qur'anic *nass* or Prophetic report, but from an *ijtihad* drawn from the thoughts of the Predecessors, and it has been accepted on the basis of *qiyas* from past precedents.<sup>81</sup> As this *qiyas* had the full backing of the consensus of the Ummah, it had gained the status of a founding pillar of the shariah, more potent than an honest or independent opinion. Similar possibilities of opening new doors to independent thinking through *qiyas* died a premature death when it was confined within reports and consensus.

The search for *ratio legis* was an alien thought in the Qur'anic framework. Human beings do not have the liberty to look for reason and motives in Allah's commandments. Firstly, such an endeavor is not possible because it cannot be said that the formulations arrived at after great efforts would be the same as was intended by Allah. Secondly, the efforts to determine such motives on individual levels may even result in the abrogation of Allah's intent/action. Then what was the need to tread on such a dangerous realm where there was the risk of straying away at every moment? But jurisprudence which is seen as the intervention of human intelligence in the activities relating to the worship of Allah, creates a world where, in the name of implementing Allah's intent, human beings work against it and thus defeat its main objective. We are aware of the juristic hair-splitting of the Israeli scholars as a result of which it was considered objectionable to don the usual dress and go about on the day of Sabbath. Even the act of tendering medical help to the sick, or opening the fridge to feed guests was considered to be impermissible.<sup>82</sup> The process of the search for the *ratio legis* gave birth to this kind of unnecessary juristic hair-splitting in Muslim jurisprudence. Our efforts to determine proper ways of worship alienated us from the soul of worship.

As long as *qiyas* was limited to the search for the *ratio legis*, despite all its inadequacies in matters of thought, its roots were, in some way or other, present in the text or the context. But when the search for the *ratio legis* manifested itself in the meaning or at different levels of the background, and when the hair-splitting debates concerning *tard* (finding analogies) and *aks* (finding binary opposites) came under discussion among the jurists, the issues of 'general' and 'specific' gained prominence, it led to a free for all among the jurists. In the beginning, the jurists in their judgment on all that not explicitly mentioned in the text always felt bound to be guided by the general principles inferred from text. In such circumstances, their decisions could very well be criticized and commented upon by their opponents. However, when the jurists, in order to prove their decision correct, took the help of the abrogator and the abrogated, gave birth to the debate of 'general' and 'specific', then there was no scope left for the opponents to criticize them or refute their arguments, and to a large extent, *qiyas* came out of the conceptual framework in which it was sought to be kept confined in the beginning. The result was that in later years, the search for the *ratio legis* became more of an intellectual pursuit than juristic one. And then Allama Baji, the Malekite jurist, could arrive at the only intellectual formulation regarding the animal hair that as it (the hair) was not incorporated in the list of living parts (of animals), it could be separated from its body

and could be used.<sup>83</sup> Ghazali, on the basis of such rational thinking, refused to take *eila* to be equal to divorce because in case of *eila* one does not get the rationale for divorce, directly or by suggestion. Here (in the case of *eila*), the spouses only vow to stay away from sexual relationship. That is why this cannot be taken as the intent for divorce.<sup>84</sup> As this trend of pure intellectual ratiocination developed, the jurisprudence gradually moved out of that basic framework of the Faith where there was the trend to take every issue as an offshoot and its roots were traced in the Book or the sunnah. This led to a situation where the jurists could not even defend the collective justice and the principle of equality. For example, for the marriage of a grown-up girl, the Malekite jurists considered her consent unnecessary simply because there was no sanction for it in the Malekite school. They said that only Allah knew its *ratio legis*. 'It is obligated upon us to marry her to whomever we want, without her consent.'<sup>85</sup> Some scholars offered intellectual arguments to place slaves and animals on the same footing. Their argument ran – as we cannot discriminate between wine made from grapes and whisky as they are identical in their effect, similarly the slaves could not be given the right to ownership. According to them, they cannot be given rights reserved for human beings because, like animals, they also can be bought and sold.<sup>86</sup>

Once the search for the *ratio legis* gained the status of a standard juristic method, it paved the way for every individual to undertake the search for *ratio legis* according to his own capacity, which was considered a natural act for him. The result was rather than worship, people began to lay greater emphasis on the soul of worship discovered by themselves. Many great Islamic leaders and thinkers of the time created an Islam which was outside the basic framework of the Faith. As the whole emphasis now was on *ratio legis*, neither prayer nor fasting was given importance as before, nor was there any strong aversion to evils and sinfulness as before. Towering intellectuals like Ibn Sina and Farabi found justification for drinking wine as, according to them, drinking wine rather than other articles of food or beverages brought them peace of mind and provided them with a means to forget the pangs of life. As these luminaries considered themselves knowledgeable about the real nature of things and the *ratio legis* of the shariah, it became possible for them to 'use wine in such a way as would enable them to stay away from conflicts and quarrels.'<sup>87</sup> The *ratio legis* provided an excuse for a kind of permissiveness in the personal lives of some of the intellectuals of Islam.

We should not ignore the fact that logic and scholasticism have left their deep impact on the methodology of jurisprudence. To search for *ratio legis* in Allah's intent is the product of a kind of scholastic mind that had gradually moved out of the framework of Islamic thought. It should not be lost sight of that despite opposing the

scholastics vehemently, scholars of Islam have also been appreciative of the services they had rendered to Islam. Traditionists and jurists undertook a deep study of the school, even if to refute its arguments. Logic has always been taught in Islamic seminaries as an integral part of its syllabus. Whether it is Shafei's *Al-Risala* or Ghazali's *Al-Mustafa*, even if they oppose the scholastics, one can see the deep impact of the method of argumentation that had been undertaken by the scholastics. Jurisprudence which, in the beginning, started out with the objective of finding out Allah's intent had, under the influence of scholasticism, become a plea for human intellectualism, in later years. *Qiyas* which was once just another name for *ra'ai* and *ijtihad*, slowly moved out totally from the Islamic framework. So much so that some Islamic scholars began to declare it openly that (*masa'leh*) pragmatism should be given precedence over *nass* and consensus.<sup>88</sup> References based on *istihsan* and interrupted reports became the main identifiers of jurists. The situation became so bad that against this background of the ever-increasing conflicts in matters of logic, the Islamic scholars had to eventually decide to do away with even a productive *qiyas* like *ijtihad*. This prevailing atmosphere of conflict impeded any possibility of a positive discussion on the objectives of the shariah or any critical assessment of the deviations from shariah. If the jurists had got confined within the psychological barriers put up by themselves, a major segment of the thinking people got tired of the juristic and ideological confusion and gave birth to a new faith that they called *tasawwuf* (mysticism).

### FROM UNITY TO FRAGMENTATION

As Jurisprudence slowly moved out of the Qur'anic paradigm, it resulted in a situation reflected in the verse — أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ ۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا— Jurisprudence was now regarded as the genuine expression of the interpretation of the Faith where the issues drawn from the Book and the sunnah provided practical guidance to the common man. As opposed to the Qur'an, books of jurisprudence had acquired the status of the practical Qur'an. Slowly, the deviant thoughts and disagreements related to jurisprudence also acquired a mantle of sacredness. The juristic disagreements operated mainly on two levels. Firstly, there is no mechanism for scrutiny and criticism of the conflicting and contradictory thoughts that had crept into our religious thinking undertaken by the jurists. There is no doubt about the fact that the jurists of the earlier period were traditionists too. However, since the concept of history prevalent among them had already got distorted, they were not aware of any other method of the scrutiny and evaluation of reports except 'refutation and co-relation' (*jirh' wa ta'deel*) of the reporters. And then as the very method of

transmission, to a great extent, had become the prisoner of history, and history had consolidated its position through sacred sources and references, the jurists had no other option, in those circumstances, except declaring the mutually contradictory reports to be concurrently valid. At the most, they could declare one statement to be superior to another just to indicate their intellectual preferences. The result was – different and contradictory juristic views were expressed on the same issue, so much so that a continuous and uninterrupted method of worship like salah could not escape the scourge of such disagreements.<sup>89</sup> Everyday activities related to prayer like ablution,<sup>90</sup> bath<sup>91</sup> and dry ablution became subjects of serious controversy among the jurists. When the concept of history held by the jurists began to be couched in the self-styled religious terms and in the tone and tenor of jurisprudence, then the utterances and practices paved the way for perpetual controversy in matters of Faith.

Another level of juristic disagreements related to the inferential understanding of the reports which, to a large extent, depended on human intellection rather than Revelation. The un-ending cycle of inferences not only severed jurisprudence's relationship with Divine verses, but that the reports themselves were left behind in this process of drawing inferences. In such circumstances, human nature being what it is, it was essential that there would be multiple, conflicting and contradictory expression of juristic thinking by the jurists. For example, if among the Hanafites and the Shafeites, one finds two different views on the issue that if a pregnant woman dies whether her belly should be ripped open to bring out the living child, then this disagreement basically emanates from the human knowledge about newer medical amenities.<sup>92</sup> It has nothing to do with any textual ruling (*nass*) from the Qur'an or any suggestion from it. Similarly, the question whether the vinegar remains pure or not if a frog falls in a glass filled with it (vinegar), rather than looking for guidance in *nass* or reports, Imam Muhammad tried to find an answer to it purely on the basis of human intelligence which had a deep impact of Greek philosophy on it. He offered the argument that if the frog dies in its own habitat the water would remain pure, and if this water is poured in the vinegar, the vinegar would also become pure.<sup>93</sup> If a dog falls in a well in such a way that its mouth remains above water, then the water of the well would remain pure.<sup>94</sup> But if the tail of a rat gets severed and falls in the well, then all the water in the well would have to be taken out.<sup>95</sup> The waiting period of 90 years for a missing wife is also the result of the intervention of human intellect that is usually attributed to Abu Hanifa. It is said that according to Abu Hanifa, when the missing person would have attained the age of 120 (and, according to Abu Yusuf, the person

attained the age of 100), then the person should be taken as dead.<sup>96</sup> The formulation that for determining parentage, the minimum period of pregnancy should be 6 months and the maximum period two years was the result of the deduction from the medical intelligence of the jurists of a particular period.<sup>97</sup> Not only that it has no basis in the Qur'an but also current medical researches also do not consider it reliable. About the weaning period, the insistence by Abu Hanifa that its duration is two and a half years (3 years according to Zafr), is the result of the intellectual deduction of these two gentlemen and not the result of any guidance from the Qur'an.<sup>98</sup> One cannot draw any inference from *nass* on these issues. When salah, which had the position of a seminal method of worship in the Qur'anic paradigm, was begun to be seen as a mere technical or ritual activity, it gave birth to the debate as to which elements of salah were obligatory and which were non-obligatory or supererogatory. It was also said that even though the terminal gestures of salam during the salah were appropriate, but if the jurisprudence could decide that the salah had indeed reached completion, then it could very well find ways and means to terminate it. Thus, some jurists thought of other possibilities of coming out of the salah before the final gesture of turning the head towards the right and the left (salam). For example, according to the jurists belonging to the Hanafite School, if a person, instead of turning his head towards right and left, does something, even intentionally, that results in the loss of ablution, then the salah would not be spoiled or invalid but his action would be taken as a substitute for the terminal salam.<sup>99</sup> Disagreements also arose among jurists about the actions that could prematurely terminate salah. If an action, mannerism etc, is continuous and it gives the impression that the performer is busy in that action rather than the salah, then his salah would be considered invalid. A juristic plea was found to get round such a problem. According to a jurist belonging to the Hanafite School, if a person performing the salah goes on killing a louse at small intervals, after each *ruk'n* (step), then his salah will not be invalid.<sup>100</sup> The stipulation of the Hanafite jurists that for women it is essential to tie their hands on the chests is also a result of human deduction undertaken by them<sup>101</sup> for which no evidence can be drawn from the Book and the sunnah. However, once such stipulations get an entrée into the books of a school, it stays there in perpetuity.<sup>102</sup> In many reliable books of the Hanafite School, it has been stated that if a part of the dress becomes soiled or impure, and if the person does not remember which part is soiled, then he may wash any part of the dress and it would become pure.<sup>103</sup> This principle of attaining purity is a product of the mind and heart of the jurists rather than any instruction in the Book and the sunnah. There is no doubt that this kind of solution may provide mental



satisfaction to some, but to accord it respectability or sacredness on the basis of shariah is dangerous and fraught with alarming consequences.

As the jurisprudence moved out of the Qur'anic framework and started depending heavily on human capacity for ratiocination, it cut itself from the vital spring of Revelation. Further, it also paved the way for the entry of local views and superstition. For example, it was stated that if one gripped the *miswak* stick, then one could catch piles, and that by chewing it one could lose one's eyesight, and that after brushing the teeth if one did not wash it then the devil might use it to brush his teeth. It was also said that if one used a stick longer than 6 inches, then devil would ride on it etc.<sup>104</sup> we do not know if such beliefs have any basis in the Faith. However, those who wanted to build their religious life on books of jurisprudence rather than the Qur'an it was natural that they should pass through such a phase when, in the conduct of different activities of daily life, they had to take recourse to superstitions and threats rather than the fear of Allah. The jurists, in fact, can be said to have compiled sacred editions of local superstition and evils, and in doing so, they incorporated such ideas as totally transformed the message of the Divine Word. If one comes to think of it, it was a process of reviving superstitions and evils of the pre-Islamic era and incorporating them in the Islamic way of life. For example, it was said that it was permissible to write surah Fatiha or surah Ikhlas with blood on the forehead if one is sure that such an action would stop bleeding.<sup>105</sup> This edict was also brought to the fore that if anyone's nose did not stop to bleed, then he was allowed to write the verses of the Qur'an on the forehead.<sup>106</sup> In the age of Jahiliya, some societies believed it permissible to sacrifice young children and committing such other despicable acts for the good of the society. It is regrettable that the jurists began to support such acts under the impact of local influences and pressures forgetting the fact that Islam as a religion had emerged to put an end to such superstitions and despicable acts. They even issued instructions to the fact that for the purposes of regaining health it was allowed to drink urine or blood and eat the flesh of the dead, if it is prescribed by the doctor.<sup>107</sup>

An interesting example of the intervention of human reason in jurisprudence can be found on the issue of attaining purity, where the concepts of purity and pollution are influenced by the jurist's own temperament and the local situation and taste. To consider it as a genuine expression of the shariah would amount to giving a sacred status to individual preferences. The following examples will illustrate this point:

- The Hanafite jurists opine that if urine or excreta falls in a tank of 10 x 10 yards size, the water of the tank will remain pure.<sup>108</sup>

- If a tank of any size is filled with grape juice and urine falls in it, the juice will remain pure.<sup>109</sup>
- Some jurists opined that if a dead dog is found in a big tank, one can perform ablution from the opposite side of the tank.<sup>110</sup>
- If the dead dog settles down at the bottom of the tank, then it is permissible to perform ablution with the water of the tank.<sup>111</sup>
- The spot where the impurity falls in the tank, it is permissible to do ablution from that spot.<sup>112</sup>
- If impurity falls in a stream, and if one draws water from its proximity, then the water is pure.<sup>113</sup>
- The flesh of the injured spot is edible, or if a worm comes out of the wound and falls in the water, that water will be considered pure.<sup>114</sup>
- The water used to remove or wash impurity will be considered pure.<sup>115</sup>

We do not know on what basis of shariah the jurists arrived at the above formulations. They seem to reflect only personal preferences. Treating them as the genuine expression of the shariah has made our jurisprudence a reflection of the likes and dislikes of individuals.

It is not as if these jurists, through formulating elaborate rules of purity, have established any high standard of cleanliness that can be termed as the external manifestation of a sacred environment. On the contrary, it so happened that because of personal predilections and incorporating local influences, they have established a very low standard and accorded it the mantle of sacredness. In later years, this low standard acquired the dimension of a genuine reference in Islamic thinking. For example, Imam Muhammad's view that even if the entire dress gets soaked in the animal urine it would remain pure<sup>116</sup> or that drinking animal urine, even without pressing reasons, is permissible,<sup>117</sup> or to assert that there is evidence from the Hanafite jurists that the urine of bats and rats is pure,<sup>118</sup> are the views or statements made by jurists at different times and at different places, depending on their individual judgments. However genuine they may have been in their specific circumstances, they cannot be declared to be an integral part of a timeless and universal religion like Islam. The Hanafites consider that one *misqal* (a measurement) amount of human excreta can be ignored or excused,<sup>119</sup> but the adherents of other schools of jurisprudence do not think that it demonstrates a high standard of cleanliness. Similarly, the assertion by some other jurists that if three and a half *masha* (a measurement) amount of the worst kind of filth, i.e. human excreta or semen falls on a piece of cloth, it will remain pure,<sup>120</sup> or the statement that after cleaning the bottom with stone (after defecation), if

the sweat from the rump soaks the cloth, the purity of the cloth will not be affected<sup>121</sup> or after cleaning the bottom with stone if one does not wash it, it will not be undesirable,<sup>122</sup> or that an amount of liquid excreta that can be contained at the bottom of one's palm can be ignored,<sup>123</sup> are the kinds of views that we have characterised as 'individual' or 'personal' preferences. We do not know what evidence of shariah is there in the books of the Hanafites to declare that the urine of a bat is pure.<sup>124</sup> As for those who opine that even if the droppings of rats get mixed with wheat, as long as it does not change the taste of the wheat, it cannot be declared impure, one can only say that these statements indicate, more than their allegiance to shariah, a futile effort on their part to give respectability to their own preferences. It does not have even the remotest connection with the shariah of Muhammad.

Some people feel that if there is no guidance from jurisprudence about the multiple and variegated activities of life and if even the tiny details are not clearly laid down for the common people then chaos and confusion will overtake their religious life. According to this view, jurisprudence helps to keep the Muslim society together and provides a practical basis for it. But those who are aware of the far-reaching consequences arising out of juristic hair-splitting and who know about a thousand-year-old conflict in matters of jurisprudence in the Ummah, and also appreciate the fact as to how the disagreements on jurisprudence had played a key role in the downfall of Muslims – from the fall of Baghdad to other lesser debacles in political and intellectual spheres – would certainly be waiting to be released from the stranglehold of jurisprudence. As a matter of fact, the different schools of jurisprudence came into being as a result of the disappearance of an atmosphere of unity both at the individual and collective levels. So much so that even in matters of prayer and worship, jurists of the same school could not agree many a times. To speak the truth, a greater part of the chaos and confusion crept into our religious books through jurisprudence. For example, many books of the Hanafite school consider ablution to be valid even if it is not performed in the proper order,<sup>125</sup> or consider any order unnecessary for dry ablution,<sup>126</sup> or to declare that if anyone throws his head into dust with the intent of dry ablution, it would be valid,<sup>127</sup> or if anyone throws himself on the earth and if his arms, palms and face get smeared with dust, it would be considered equal to a proper dry ablution.<sup>128</sup> It could have been that the objective of these statements was to discourage unnecessary insistence on ritualism, but these kinds of technical statements provided the basis for unnecessary debates: ablution (*wudu*) or dry ablution (*tayammum*), as they are, whether the order is necessary or the intent (*niyat*), and that how many steps (*ruk'n*) needed to be completed and how, so that it can be

counted as a completed ablution or dry ablution. The Hanafites opined that if one is drenched in the rainwater or if one plunges into a running stream, then it would be considered that one has performed ablution,<sup>129</sup> or that if one washes the head along with the face, then there would be no need to run the hands over the head.<sup>130</sup> It could be so that such statements were intended to simplify the procedures and focus attention on the main act, but in practice, they had the unintended consequence of paving the way for juristic interference, analysis and interpretation even in basic matters of prayer and worship. And then the jurists found it possible to say that while turning the head for salam at the end of salah even if one intentionally lets out a guffaw, the salah would still be valid<sup>131</sup> or that if a person performing the salah behind an imam (*muqtadi*) begins to talk with the imam after reciting the *tashahhud*, the salah will remain valid<sup>132</sup> or that the dry ablution is permissible even with the dust accumulated in the stomach of dog or pig,<sup>133</sup> or that if one reads the letters separately then one can read the Qur'an in the lavatory.<sup>134</sup> In the tone and tenor of these edicts, rather than interpreting shariah, what one finds is a desire to strengthen the grip of jurisprudence on the people. The author of *Hidayah* has, in fact, left a surprisingly strange example of imaginative flight by declaring that while doing ablution if anyone forgets to wash a particular part, he should merely wash his left leg for ablution to be valid.<sup>135</sup>

Rather than seeing problems within the basic framework of the Faith when the jurists began to look simply and technically at different activities, they found themselves submerged in the sphere of forbidden and reprehensible acts. Books of jurisprudence, at many places, became a reference point for the possibility of forbidden acts, and through this way entered the institution of clergy in our religious thought.<sup>136</sup> Fabricated and speculative enquiry, steeped in a kind of permissiveness, took the place of juristic issues. For example, when our jurists say that if anyone has sex with animals, dead or alive, or with a minor girl, then the ablution remains intact,<sup>137</sup> or that if one touches one's own genitals or anyone else's it does not affect the ablution,<sup>138</sup> we do not know whether such statements are intended to clarify aspects of ablution or to provide justification for an underlying urge for permissiveness. When the author of *Durre Mukhtar* declares that if one has sex with an animal, with the dead or with a minor girl, and there is no ejaculation then bath is not obligatory for that person<sup>139</sup> or his statement that if a boy of ten years has sex with an adult girl then it is not obligatory on the boy to take bath,<sup>140</sup> or that after having sex with a minor girl one need not wash the genital,<sup>141</sup> one wonders if such formulations emanated from a desire to educate people on aspects of purity. We feel that this was possible because we had

alienated these issues from the basic framework of piety and methods of worship and were content to look at them as mere technical problems. Otherwise, there was no reason why in an environment whose foundation was laid on Allah's pleasure, we should need a jurisprudence that would tell us that if anyone commits sex with an animal, on its private parts or thighs, and there is no ejaculation then bath will not be obligatory,<sup>142</sup> or if one penetrates into the genital, in that case also bathing will not be obligatory.<sup>143</sup> In a pious environment, how can one expect that a believer would indulge in such reprehensible acts, would cross all limits of forbidden and condemnable acts and yet, on the issue of purity, he would agonise over the fact as to whether bathing will be obligatory if he pushes the head of the penis into the front or rear hole of a double eunuch,<sup>144</sup> or that he would ask the question as to whether bathing will be obligatory if he/ she inserts an artificial male organ in the hole.<sup>145</sup> Such answers in the books of jurisprudence are similar to the act of 'sifting mosquitoes and swallowing camels'. One wonders for what kind of environment such rules of jurisprudence were formulated, and in answer to what kind of needs in future? It became possible for the jurists to dabble with forbidden things only when their relationship with the basic framework of the Revelation grew weak. When all these transactions of piety were carried out outside the framework of Islamic thought, it was natural for the jurists to stray to the way of Hillel and Shammai.<sup>146</sup>

The changing concept of history among the Muslims and the influence of Greek logic soon made jurisprudence a battleground of warring human opinions rather than a human expression of the divine will. Shariah, in principle, remained *khitab al-Share'*<sup>147</sup> (Commandments of God) and the fuqahah drew their legitimacy on this basis<sup>148</sup> but things were different on the ground. The books of fiqh were now filled with the views of individuals and the mutual disagreements among jurists where one found that the frequency of 'Abu Hanifa said...' (qala Abu Hanifa), 'Abu Yusuf said...', 'Muhammad said...', 'Zafr said...', 'Sarkhasi said...' and 'Halwai said...' submerged the lesser frequency of 'Allah said...' or 'Al-Shari' Ta'la said...' Slowly the ears of the thinkers could hear lesser and lesser of the latter. The result was – the same thing that was declared permissible and desirable by one imam was declared impermissible and forbidden by other imams. For example, serious disagreements arose between the Hanafites and the Shafeites regarding things which were permissible to eat and the use of utensils for the purpose of eating.<sup>149</sup> The catholicity of Shafeites in matters of eatables and the liberal attitude of the Hanafites in other matters offered both the groups the opportunity to claim that their own school was better suited to fulfil the demands of the changing times, very few people asked the question as to who gave the

believers the permission to follow one among the various schools of jurisprudence. And that whether the choosing of one school in preference to another should be seen as following the Revelation or an escape from it?

One interesting example of turning jurisprudence into the personal views of individuals is provided by the issue of the 'concept of a woman's honour after being subjected to sexual abuse' (*hurmat bil-zina*) about which one finds detailed debates in the books of Hanafites and the Shafeites. The Shafeite School does not consider the honour of a woman being affected by adultery. According to this view, if the father had committed adultery with a woman, it will be permissible for the son, from the point of view of shariah, to marry that woman. The Shafeites School extended the purview of this formulation so much as to declare that any man is allowed to marry a girl who is born out of his own act of adultery with a woman. As adultery is strictly forbidden and an illegal act from the point of view of the shariah, it cannot be the means to turn a permissible act into an impermissible one. As opposed to this view, Abu Hanifa who stresses the sociological and psychological aspects of such acts, does not consider it permissible for a man to marry a girl who is born out of his own adultery. According to him, to do so would be against the principles of nature, even if it were not against *nass*. Another interesting examples of how jurists make their personal views wear the mantle of shariah is provided by the status of the evidence by women in cases of divorce, love etc. According to Abu Hanifa, in the cases of marriage, divorce, love etc., the evidence rendered by women has the same weight as that rendered by men, whereas other imams do not consider the evidence of women reliable in these matters. In matters where evidence by women is considered permissible, it is conditional upon the fact that the evidence rendered by one man will be treated on a par with the evidence rendered by two women. Shafei takes this number up to four. Abu Hanifa considers women worthy to occupy the seat of a judge while the other imams do not agree with him on this issue. These and similar other disagreements spring from the jurists' own insight, their own understanding of the Faith, and they should not be treated as anything more than their personal views. But by declaring them to be the genuine expressions of the Faith and correct interpretation of the shariah we have accorded the views of the people almost the same kind of sacredness that is reserved for the Revelation.

There is no doubt that every person would draw insight and derive advantages from Revelation according to his own knowledge, foresight, piety and the responsiveness of his heart and mind. It is also a natural fact that people will differ in their understanding and interpretation. But rather than presenting their disagreements

as a matter of personal views and preferences, the jurists declared them to be the formulations of the shariah, and thus their personal views wore the mantle of sacredness and began to be treated as the immortal rules of the shariah. The result of this canonization of personal views and their sacred apparel was that for all times to come the disagreements in matters of jurisprudence acquired a kind of religious authority. There would hardly be any sphere of life that remained free of the disagreements among jurists. It is given out that all Muslims follow one Qur'an, one Prophet and one shariah, but when a common Muslim turns to the pages of books of jurisprudence, he feels puzzled by the surfeit of conflicting and contradictory views on aspects of shariah, and feels at a loss as to which view he should accept as the correct expression of the shariah, and which views he should reject. Turn the pages from the 'Book of Purity' (*Kitab Al-Tehara*) to the last pages, there will hardly be any page that is free of juristic disputes. For example, if according to Imam Malik only the flesh of pig is impure, not its other parts, other imams consider every part of a pig to be impure.<sup>150</sup> According to the Hanafites, only the saliva of the dog is impure, not its body whereas, according to Imam Malik and Akramah even the saliva is not impure.<sup>151</sup> According to Shafei, Ahmad and Sufian Thawri, semen is pure whereas Abu Hanifa and Malik consider it impure.<sup>152</sup> According to the Hanbalites, running the hands over (*mash*) the socks is preferable than washing feet.<sup>153</sup> According to Malik, it is permissible to do so only on leather stockings, not on ordinary socks. Shafei considers *mush* permissible on the socks only when one is wearing shoes whereas the Hanafites permit *mash* only on cotton socks.<sup>154</sup> According to Shafeites and Hanbalites, if the socks have holes in them then the *mash* is not permissible whereas the Malekites consider it permissible.<sup>155</sup> According to Bukhari, Tabari and Zwahiri, a woman during ceremonial impurity can read the Qur'an whereas the Shafeites and the Hanbalites do not consider reading of the Qur'an permissible in such a condition.<sup>156</sup> According to Shafei and Ahmad, a woman in her menses cannot enter a mosque but can pass through it (as it is permissible to pass through a mosque during ceremonial impurity) whereas according to Zwahiri, she can both enter a mosque and stay there (if there is no fear of the mosque being polluted).<sup>157</sup> According to Abu Hanifa, it is permissible to deliver the Friday address in languages other than Arabic. According to Malekites, the address should be delivered in no other language except Arabic, and if there is no one to address the audience in Arabic then it should be suspended.<sup>158</sup> For Imam Malik and Imam Ahmad, there is no sunnah before the Friday salah whereas among the Hanafites and the Shafeites, there is sunnah before the Friday prayer, just as in the case of zuhr prayer.<sup>159</sup> Among the Hanafites, during the course of a journey, *qasr* (shortening of

prayer) is obligatory (*wajib*) whereas the Malekites prefer the *qasr* to be performed in congregation (*jamat*), and if there is no travelling imam available, then one may perform the *qasr* alone.<sup>160</sup> According to Malik and Shafei, a husband can bathe his dead wife while according to Abu Hanifa and Sufian Thawri, it is not permissible.<sup>161</sup> In the funeral prayer (*salat-al-janazah*), Shafei and Hanbal not only advocate reading of surah Fatiha, and the Hanafites consider it as objectionable (*makrooh tanzih*), the Malekites consider it reprehensible (*makrooh tahrim*).<sup>162</sup> The Shafeites and the Hanbalites are in favour of the funeral prayer in absentia, whereas Malik and Abu Hanifa do not consider it permissible.<sup>163</sup> According to Malik and Shafei, zakat is obligatory only on products like grains that can be stored. Among the fruit, apart from dates and raisins, zakat is not applicable on any other fruit. Vegetables are free from zakat. But Imam Ahmad, Yusuf and Muhammad opine that zakat is obligatory on all dry fruit, although they also think that vegetables should be free from zakat. However, Abu Hanifa declares zakat to be obligatory even in the case of vegetables.<sup>164</sup>

Abu Hanifa does not consider the determination of a minimum amount necessary for zakat. To him, one must pay zakat whatever the quantum of production. But the other reporters such as Shafei, Malik and Hanbal consider zakat not obligatory if the quantum is less than five *wisq*.<sup>165</sup> Imam Malik considers it obligatory to pay zakat even on the fruit on trees by making an approximate estimate, Imam Ahmad and Shafei consider it sunnah, but Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf and Muhammad consider it impermissible.<sup>166</sup> According to Abu Hanifa, the condition for zakat on honey is that it must be produced on tith land, and there is no minimum amount of production for that; on the contrary, Imam Ahmad does not consider the condition of tith land necessary and he is in favour of a minimum amount. According to Imam Ahmad, the amount of honey should be 160 *ratl* (about 2 maunds) to merit zakat, to Abu Yusuf, it should be 10 *ratl* and to Imam Muhammad, it should be 180 *ratl*.<sup>167</sup> To the Hanafites, paying zakat is obligatory on gold, silver, brass, nickel, iron and all such metals, whereas the Shafeites and Malekites do not consider zakat obligatory on any other metals except gold and silver. According to Hanbalites, all materials, whether liquid or solid, are subject to zakat.<sup>168</sup> According to Abu Hanifa, it is impermissible to spend the proceeds from zakat in trying to win the hearts and minds of people (such as, the new converts to Islam). Shafeites and some Malekites consider it permissible to spend on winning the hearts and minds of Muslims, but not of infidels.<sup>169</sup> According to Malik, Shafei and Ibn Hanbal, *sadqah-al- fitr* (Eid morning alms) consists of one *sa'* (about 3.5 k.g.) of wheat, whereas the Hanafites fix it to its half.<sup>170</sup> According to Abu Hanifa, for *sadqa-e fitr*, one can pay in cash, rather paying cash is preferable. However,



according to the Shafeiites and the Hanbalites, paying in cash is not permissible. They consider it undesirable (*makrooh*).<sup>171</sup>

To Abu Hanifa and Imam Ahmad, the evidence of one man is enough for sighting the moon whereas Imam Malik considers the evidence of two reliable witnesses necessary for it.<sup>172</sup> According to the Hanafites, Shafeiites and the Hanbalites, it is desirable to ask children to fast (*sawm*) at the age of 7, and chastise them by the age of 10, whereas the Malekites do not consider it desirable.<sup>173</sup> According to Imam Malik no person can fast on behalf of another, Ibn Hanbal is in favour of the proxy fasting for the obligatory (*fardh*) fasts; Imam Abu Sawr and other traditionists consider it permissible to fast on behalf of the dead.<sup>174</sup> According to Ibn Hazm, fasting on Friday is not only undesirable (*makrooh*), but forbidden (*haram*), whereas according to Abu Hanifa and Malik, fasting on Friday is permissible and not undesirable.<sup>175</sup> According to Abu Hanifa and Malik, fasting on six specific days in the month of Shawwal is undesirable, whereas the later jurisprudents of the Hanafite and the Malekite schools consider it permissible.<sup>176</sup> Every month, supererogatory fasting on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> is doubly desirable, whereas for the Malekites, it is undesirable to fix specific dates for supererogatory fasting.<sup>177</sup> According to the Hanafites, Shafeiites and the Hanbalites, it is permissible to kiss or hug one's wife during fasting, whereas according to the Malekites it is absolutely undesirable. But according to the Zahiriya point of view, it is absolutely permissible to kiss and hug one's wife. They go so far as to declare that even if ejaculation takes place because of such acts, the fasting is not affected.<sup>178</sup> According to Abu Hanifa and Malik, if one eats intentionally during fasting, it will be obligatory upon him to undertake both substitute fasting for the missed fast, and penance, whereas according to Shafei, Hanbal and Zahiriya, only the substitute fasting for the missed fast will be obligatory, not the penance.<sup>179</sup> Abu Hanifa and Imam Ahmad consider the condition of *mahram* (a male relative with whom marriage is not permissible) valid for women during the journey for Haj pilgrimage, but Shafei and Malik do not consider the condition of *mahram* or the company of husband essential; rather the security and safety during the journey should be the primary concern.<sup>180</sup> According to the Hanafites and the Hanbalites, the best place for donning the ihram for the people of Mecca is Tan'im whereas the Shafeiites and the Malekites consider Ja'rana to be the best place for it.<sup>181</sup> According to Abu Hanifa, Shafei, Ahmad and Dawood Zahiri, to use perfume before ihram is not only permissible but a sunnah too, whereas Malik and Muhammad do not consider it permissible. Some consider it absolutely forbidden (*haram*) while others consider it undesirable (*makrooh*).<sup>182</sup> These

are only a few illustrations, but truly speaking, it is not really possible to enumerate all possible disagreements in matters of Islamic jurisprudence.

In this atmosphere of juridical conflicts and disagreements, it became difficult for the believers to restore Faith to its pristine form. Despite declaring the views of the four jurists as the genuine expression of the Faith, there was no resolution of their disagreements in sight. The question continued to stare in the face as to what could be the correct attitude to adopt when serious disagreements prevailed among the four jurists on such basic issues as things obligatory and forbidden, permissible and impermissible, desirable and reprehensible etc.? Particularly on issues where the four jurists hold four different views, what could be the correct interpretation of the Faith? Rather than resolving these conflicts and this prevailing atmosphere of confusion once for all, the Islamic scholars thought upon the rather fatuous solution of this problem by declaring that all these schools of thought would be considered equally reliable. Some scholars declared in public that Imam Abu Hanifa, Shafei, Malik, Ahmad bin Hanbal and Sufian Thawri are the true imams and that their mutual conflicts should be regarded as a blessing from Allah. Some other scholars opined that if two mujtahids of the same stature expressed different views on an issue, then it is permissible for their followers to follow either of them.<sup>183</sup> Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi has, in fact, accorded these four jurists the status of 'coming from Allah'. According to him, as the shariah is from the heavens, similarly the evidence by the mujtahids should be treated as such (from Allah):

لكل جعلنا شريعة ومنهاجا وكذلك لكل مجتهد جعل له شريعة من دليله ومنهاجا وهو عين دليله في إثبات الحكم ويحرم عليه العدل عند وقرر الشرع الالهي ذلك كله فحرم الشافعي عين ما أحله الحنفي وأجاز أبوحنيفة عين ما منعه أحمد بن حنبل فأجاز هذا ما لم يحرم هذا والتقوا في أشياء واختلفوا في أشياء والكل في هذه الأمة شرع مقرر لنا من عند الله مع علمنا أن مرتبتهم دون مرتبة الرسل الموحى إليهم من عند الله<sup>184</sup>.

The consequence of regarding the evidence provided by the mujtahids as emanating from Allah and declaring the jurisprudence generated by the four imams to be a result of divine intervention was that it led to a closure of all the possibilities of correction for the distortions in the realm of jurisprudence. This situation effectively placed the four imams on the pedestal of mini prophets and any interpretation of the Faith without references to their views became impossible. In this atmosphere of juridical extremism and conflicting views, the vital question as to what was really Allah's intent remained unanswered.

Declaring the four imams to be equally reliable was, in fact, a compromise formula devised by the Islamic scholars. In the later years, as all the four schools of thought gained respectability, a strange view developed among the jurists which

is known as 'right to differ' (*marat al-khilaf*). As the interpretation of the Faith had become fully dependent on human knowledge, jurisprudence had turned into a storehouse of individual views that had established a kind of tyranny in the life of the believers. In this prevailing atmosphere, the concept of 'right to differ' came as a way-out. Even the jurists of the Israelites could not have thought of a better stratagem to get out of the quagmire created by human beings themselves because of their misunderstandings and their excessive predilection for jurisprudence. The Israeli jurists had also expressed the view that the disagreements among the interpreters of Talmud had made the extremely severe laws of the Torah easier for the people to follow. Whatever view any member of the Israelites would adopt, taking advantage of the disagreements among the rabbis, would be considered a view that emanated from the Torah. The concept of 'right to differ' brought a similar piece of good news for the believers of Islam.

In his celebrated work, *Al-Muwafiqat*, Shatibi has presented many examples to demonstrate how things were made easy and comfortable for the believers through the concept of the 'right to disagree.'<sup>185</sup> It is said that a woman who, on the basis of Malikite jurisprudence, did not have any right to the bride money (*meher*) or was being deprived of the property of her husband, sought the help of the Hanafite jurisprudence to claim those rights. As the Hanafites and the Malekites had different views on the issue, justice required that she should be given the rights due to her through recourse to the Hanafite jurisprudence. The proper course of action should have been that if the Malekites thought that their views were against the demands of justice, they should have undertaken a rethinking on the issue. However, when jurisprudence is considered to have emanated from the heavens, it leaves no scope for such scrutiny or reevaluation. There is no dearth of examples in the compilations of edicts where, to get round the problem of the inflexibility of juristic formulations, the edict-giver (*mufti*) suggests taking recourse to other schools of jurisprudence. Countless examples can be cited from the edicts of the Hanafite school of jurisprudence where, to get round the problem of the strictness of the Hanafite laws, the *mufti* advised people to solve their problems through taking recourse to the Shafeiite school of jurisprudence, temporarily. Particularly on the issues of triple divorce and missing persons, it is usual for the Hanafites to take recourse to the Malekite, Shafeiite and the Ahl-e Hadith school, to get round the problem of the excessive strictness of their own school. For example, if a person, under pressure, gives all the three *talaqs* to his wife at one moment, and then soon feels embarrassed by his act and wishes to reconcile with his wife and wants to circumvent the process of *halala*,

in such a situation the Hanafite jurists would advise him to approach such an Islamic scholar to obtain an edict who does not consider such divorce to be effective and opines that he can remarry his wife without any hindrance and without subjecting himself through the process of *halala*.<sup>186</sup> It is surprising that even after the weaknesses of different schools of jurisprudence became evident to their adherents, our jurists advise people to take recourse to other schools of jurisprudence than their own but do not feel the need to rethink the issues and redress the inadequacy of their own schools, nor is there any pressing urge in them to find release from the tyranny of individual views.

The books of jurisprudence are filled with such contradictions, not only among the statements of different jurists, but the statements made by the same jurist. If one juxtaposes two statements made by the same jurist, their contradiction becomes immediately apparent. In their defence, one could perhaps say that the two statements were made on two different occasions, and the jurist may have withdrawn one statement and validated the other. But the problem is that now both the statements have gained authority, through the process of sanctification, for the jurists. The juridical literature is so vast that even for the most enterprising among the jurists it is impossible to study the entire corpus accumulated over several centuries, and encompassing the compilations of statements, edicts and records of discussions in the assemblies of the great jurists, their followers and many mujtahids, or to construct a *Weltanschauung* on their basis. The jurist can draw whatever he wants from this vast repertoire.<sup>187</sup> The fact is to take recourse to the concept of 'right to differ' in an attempt to get round the problem of human formulations of jurisprudence is like trying to remedy misunderstanding with the help of misunderstanding. The result of this fruitless endeavour is that today jurisprudence has almost severed itself totally from the Revelation. What is regrettable is that rather than recognising the gravity of this situation, our scholars characterise this confusion in the world of thought as a blessing. According to them, 'Muslims derive benefits from disagreements on such issues. The salah and fasting by so many people are validated through this method on a daily basis.'<sup>188</sup>

The quest for release from a surfeit of juridical formulations not only led jurists to seek refuge in the concept of 'right to differ' or adopting an attitude of general leniency, because there were problems that their self-styled formulations also could not resolve adequately. Then, as jurisprudence, rather than becoming the soul of the shariah, slowly turned into legalistic maneuvers, the utterances and statements of jurists smacked of legal argumentations taken recourse to by lawyers. Now, the

hero of the realm of jurisprudence was one who could tell people how to circumvent the divine laws. In the books of Hanafite jurisprudence such events were narrated, sometimes with reference to Abu Hanifa himself, that make it clear that during those times the personality of the jurist and the lawyer merged into each other.<sup>189</sup> Rather than helping people carry out their religious duties, jurisprudence became a field for exhibiting one's legal expertise where brilliant jurists, through their wit, repartee, play with words and scholastic arguments, could totally reverse juridical implications of an issue. One result of the transformation of jurisprudence into a technical and legal process was that jurists felt the need of legal tricks and subterfuges to circumvent their own juridical formulations. If the scholars of Islam were clear-headed about the fact that shariah concerns itself with the soul of worship that human beings render to God according to the best of their abilities, and that their salvation in this world and the Hereafter lies in the way they render this service, then there would have been certainly no need for such subterfuges. Who better than the ulema know about the reality of excessive juridical formulations? The search for stratagems or subterfuges was an effort to get release from the errors committed by excessive human interpretations. Otherwise, not to speak of Islamic scholars, even an ordinary Muslim would not dare to show the audacity of abrogating the shariah through the means of such subterfuges.

It cannot be said with certainty as to who first took the initiative to use the shariah stratagem as a way out. One cannot be sure about the treatise on *Heel* attributed to Abu Hanifa, or the real author of the book, *Al-Heel* that achieved notoriety in later years. However, the custom of using stratagem (*heel*) as a juridical means is quite familiar a method in Islamic thought, so much so that even its severest critics not only approve of it in some specific matters but also consider it permissible as a way out of the tyranny of jurisprudence. The truth is that it provided many holy people with the opportunity and justification from the shariah to tell lies, save themselves from expiation, get out of the stringent rules of divorce devised by them, and to indulge in acts forbidden by shariah (*muharramat*) like charging interest on loan etc. Looking at the edicts of jurists and the subterfuges devised by them, one would feel that it must be difficult to lead one's religious life without taking recourse to them (i.e., the subterfuges). But if one looks at the phenomenon closely one would realize the fallacy of such an assumption. The excessive juridical formulations which we want to escape from through the means of subterfuges are, after all, devised by us and no one else. These formulations whose severity has compelled human beings to take refuge in subterfuges have no place in the rather easy shariah

given us by Allah. For example, take the case of the stratagem related to interest. Reports such as --الذهب بالذهب والفضة بالفضة مثلاً بمثل-- (Gold is to be paid for by gold, silver by silver, like for like) and other similar ones propagated the idea that one can exchange gold for gold, silver for silver or the same kind of object when the quantity is the same. Any difference in quantity would be treated as interest. This is a misunderstanding generated by the jurists themselves because of their lack of perspicacity. So far, no one cared to scrutinize these reports and analyze them in their proper perspective which would have made it clear that in the real world people do not exchange identical objects for trade.<sup>190</sup> In the context of interest (*riba*), the Qur'an declared that if anyone lent some money he could take only that amount back, nothing more than that [2:279], as any excess amount would be treated as interest. But the jurists who, as far as reports were concerned, depended wholly on the traditionists, and the more they tried to interpret the Qur'anic injunction, the more complicated the issue became. In the end, to get round the problem of interest, the jurists felt the need to take refuge under the subterfuge of shariah that the exchange should be transformed in sale. This would make it possible to abide by the instruction - وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا - and circumvent the severity of juridical laws.<sup>191</sup> To solve the problem arising out of the non-Qur'anic concept of divorce, on the one hand recourse was taken to juristic disagreements and on the other such wild stratagems were suggested as would have stunned even the Israeli Pharisees. In *Fatawa Qazi Khan* one finds reference to a person who had vowed that he would never divorce his wife, and if he did then the divorce would stand valid for all other wives as well. The jurists suggested him a stratagem to get round this problem whereby he would not be violating the vow and would also be able to get rid of his wife. The man should get married to a baby girl fed on milk. Then he should ask the mother of his wife to approach the baby girl's mother and feed from her breast. Then, on the basis of the relationship of foster-sisters the marriage will be invalid and the man will get rid of his wife.<sup>192</sup>

Then the jurists thought upon the concept of 'superfluous marriage' (*nikah fuzuli*)<sup>193</sup> to serve as a means of getting rid of the vow of marriage or they suggested that rather than giving the grape orchards on lease they should be sold off right away.<sup>194</sup> All these are instances of human efforts to remove the difficulties created by the narrow-minded approach of jurisprudence. Similarly, in matters of inheritance, despite clear Qur'anic instructions, the insistence of the jurists on the axiom -- لا وصية لوارث -- compelled them to take refuge in stratagems of shariah. First, a permissible act was declared impermissible, and then to abrogate this formulation the jurists

discovered the stratagem that the dead person should admit to have borrowed money from a reliable stranger, then he should extract the borrowed amount from the legacy of the dead stranger and give it to the legatees.<sup>195</sup> Similarly, the lack of approval about spending the zakat money for the construction of mosques or renovation of seminaries in the Hanafite jurisprudence was sought to be redressed by the jurists through '*hila' tamleek*'. Furthermore, several stratagems were posited to deprive the neighbour of the right of the first refusal.<sup>196</sup> As one goes through the kinds of stratagems suggested in the books of jurisprudence one cannot but register the impression that in the eyes of our Great Jurists and Edict-givers, shariah is just like other worldly laws. Otherwise, there seems to be no reason why even an ordinary believer should feel the necessity of human utterances and sayings in Allah's decisions, or dare to suspend them through his own innovative efforts.

In the beginning, shariah stratagems were used to impart a certain breadth to jurisprudence. The prevailing impression was that through these stratagems, jurists are able to find a way out of the narrowness of jurisprudence in such a way that the objective of the shariah is not affected. However, once shariah began to be looked upon not as Allah's intent but as a legal arena, then it was natural that the objectives of the shariah would be subverted by these stratagems. Ghazali has written this about Sheikh Sha'bi that that when someone would come calling on him he would instruct the maid servant to make a circle on the door, put her finger inside it and say that 'sir is not here', or he would instruct her to tell the visitor, 'look for him in the mosque.'<sup>197</sup> By discovering this stratagem, according to jurists, the nature of the lie was changed, and it was described as *ma'ridh* in the specific terminology of jurisprudence. As a result of the shariah stratagems, jurisprudence became a terminological labyrinth. For example, if anyone did not want to pay the penance money (*fidya*) for the missed fastings of his father and at the same time wanted to avoid being accused of violating the Qur'anic injunctions, the stratagem suggested was – he should give two kilos of wheat to a beggar and then ask it back as a gift. He should repeat the same act everyday as long as all the missed fastings are not accounted for.<sup>198</sup> For the substitute salah to make up for the missed salah of one's father, the same stratagem was suggested.<sup>199</sup> It is also said that if the dead has not left as much money as would be enough to pay for the expiation, the following stratagem could be adopted: the inheritors of the dead should borrow half a sa', i.e. about 2 k.g. of wheat and give it to a beggar, and the beggar should give it back as a gift. This act should be repeated till the entire amount of expiation is accounted for.<sup>200</sup> Stratagems were also available for a person who did not want to give money in zakat. The wealthy person for whom zakat

was obligatory could make a gift of a greater part of his wealth to his children so that zakat would not be applicable on the remainder of the wealth.<sup>201</sup> And if any person wanted that he should get back the money lent by him to someone through his zakat money, the following stratagem was suggested: he should render the zakat money to the needy person to whom he had lent money. And then he could take back the money from the person to the tune of the amount the person owed to him. If the person refused to give the money he could snatch it away from him.<sup>202</sup> Thus, the zakat was also rendered and the person could also get back the money lent to others. The stratagem for using the zakat money for buying the shroud was as follows: first, the zakat money should be rendered to the rightful person, and then that person could buy the shroud with that money.<sup>203</sup> To turn the borrowed amount into sale transaction such stratagems were devised whereby it was made possible to sell a ten-rupee note for twelve rupees for a certain period. Thus, the issue of interest was circumvented and profit was earned as well.<sup>204</sup> In our times, in the name of Islamic Banking the methods of 'permissible' transaction that have been devised in a non-Islamic environment derive their sustenance, at some stage or the other, from such stratagems of shariah.

As the stratagems of shariah attained a kind of reliability in public perception, it led to far-reaching consequences. Not only that the concept of shariah as emanating from Allah gradually lost credibility, but also people began to entertain doubts about the juridical methods of interpretation. Since the beginning, in an attempt to establish its independent identity, it was claimed that jurisprudence attempts to guide Muslims in the conduct of their lives within the clearly defined parameters of the Qur'anic view of life. In other words, its objective was to guide those people who cannot access the Qur'an directly through the books of jurisprudence. This is the reason why books of jurisprudence, despite their predilection for human interpretation, have been treated as a kind of Qur'an in practice. However, as jurisprudence slowly turned into a field of competing and conflicting views and interpretations, and to find a way out of it the jurists began to take recourse to stratagems, jurisprudence and shariah came into sharp conflict with each other. This situation led to a general climate of unease in Muslim thought.

Ibn Hazm Zahiri (384-454 hijra) and Ibn Taimiyah Hanbali (661-728 hijra) were the leading figures among those who expressed deep anxiety at the phenomenon of making the shariah a prisoner of human interpretations. There have also been a significant number of people who had voiced their concern at the closing of the Muslim mind and the transformation of shariah into jurisprudence. There is no dearth of references or statements in the books written or compiled by these people that



remind us again and again that it is not absolutely necessary to be either a Hanafite or a Malekite or a Shafeiite or a Hanbalite in order to become a true Muslim.<sup>205</sup> The emergence of one jurisprudent after another bears testimony to the fact that from the beginning our jurisprudents suffered from a sense of lack somewhere. This is the reason why a sense of inadequacy in the method of interpretation of earlier jurisprudents impelled each succeeding jurisprudent to look for a new method of interpretation. Perhaps it would not be wrong to say that from the very beginning, this sense of inadequacy and the lack of a sense of satisfaction in their own art led the jurisprudents to bring down the shariah to the level of jurisprudence. The emergence of dozens of juristic schools in the first four centuries of Islam bears witness to a sense of general unease and intellectual anxiety in the Islamic thought. One can discern this tension arising out of the efforts to harmonize heavenly signs with the reality on the ground in the intellectual history of these four centuries. While the former symbolize the divine shariah, the latter indicates to a stage of human understanding and interpretation that is known as jurisprudence. It was Shafei who most acutely felt this sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with conventional jurisprudence. He was a custodian of both the Hanafite and the Malekite schools of jurisprudence at the same time. Despite this, the gravity of the situation compelled him to speak and write against his own teachers, Imam Malik and Imam Muhammad Al-Shaibani. Shafei reached the conclusion that if on the one hand, Imam Malik accorded excessive importance to the practices of the inhabitants of Medina, Imam Muhammad's excessive dependence on *istihsan* has, to a large extent, taken jurisprudence out of the Qur'anic framework. Shafei characterizes this situation as 'suda'.<sup>206</sup> This insightful critique of conventional jurisprudence undertaken by Shafei could have remedied the distortion in thought, and perhaps something like this did happen, even if temporarily. Shafei's criticism, though otherwise a remarkable attempt to arrest the digressions in Muslim thought, in itself became a source for future digressions as later generation looked at it as an infallible and eventual methodology. The well-formulated Usool al-Fiqh that Shafei had employed as a methodology remained a revitalising force as long as they were regarded as the expression of a particular context and time. However, in later years, when Shafeis methodology attained the status of a canon and *Al-Risala* was taken as the most sublime expression of juridical principles, he too became an idol for the successive generations and not an idol breaker that he primarily intended to be. Even the most potent medicine, if applied after the expiry date, can prove to be most dangerous. Something similar happened with Shafeis principles of jurisprudence.<sup>207</sup> The school of thought that was established as an opposition to the sacredness attached

to the views of the people (*ara al-rijal*) and the critical stance that, at one time, became the means to rectify deviant thoughts, was transformed, through its canonization and attainment of a sacred status, in later years, into a prison house for intellectualism.

As opposed to the Shafeiite school of thought, the Zwahiriya and the Hanbalite schools of thought were known for their catholicity from the very beginning, and perhaps that is why Ibn Hanbal is not considered as a pioneer of jurisprudence. Similar is the case, at least in popular perception, with Zwahiri school of thought that contains enough material to subvert the concept of the 'sacred' jurisprudence. However, despite their earnest endeavors to give a new life to Islamic thought, if Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taimiyah could not give a new direction to the conventional structure of thought, its basic reason lies in the fact that these gentlemen, in their quest for a new and comparatively balanced jurisprudence and in determining its principles and elements, concentrated mainly on the sanctified view of history, which is known in the specific terminology as 'tradition' or 'practices'. Secondly, though they do seem dissatisfied with the old thought structure, they were not ready to totally abandon that structure at any cost. Similar was the case with Muhammad bin Abdulwahab who, despite all his efforts for a return to genuine Islam, could not do much else except forming a new group of people who, too, became prisoners of the concept of sanctified history. The Muslim rulers of the time validated only four schools of thought. One inevitable psychological consequence of this decision was that other schools of thought like Zwarhiriya and others receded to the background. As for the Hanbalites who, in later years, preferred to call themselves 'salafi', their professed return to the pure Divine Word was also ultimately reduced to nothing more than a mere attractive slogan. Their reverential attitude towards *salf-e salih* did not allow them to undertake a critical scrutiny of the distortion in the realms of religious and intellectual thinking. When history is made to take on a sacred mantle like the Revelation itself or people delude themselves into thinking that it is as potent as the latter, then it becomes impossible for a new critical insight or a new thinking to emerge.

Despite the canonization, on occasions people had the distinct impression that the process of juristic accretions and hair-splitting had not yet reached its logical conclusion. The impact of the tumult created in Muslim thought by the subversive ideas of Ibn Taimiyah continued to be felt for a long time. As a matter of fact, in the world of jurisprudence, the process of revolt and protest initiated in the earlier centuries is not yet complete. Of course, it can be said with certainty that there is hardly anyone else who has left an impact on our religious and juristic thinking as profound as that left by Ibn Taimiyah. The probable reason for this is that in the

history of Muslim thought, Ibn Taimiyah is considered to be the thinker who has been instrumental in liberating Muslim thought from the grip of Greek philosophy. And since in the growth and evolution of jurisprudence one cannot ignore the movement of *I'tizal*, that is why the impact left by Ibn Taimiyah proved to be so far-reaching on Muslim intellectualism. Be it Shah Waliullah or Afghani, Abduh or Rashid Radha, or the philosopher poet Muhammad Iqbal, one can easily discern the impact of Ibn Taimiyah on the thought structure of all the above personalities. In the Shia world, the crisis in juristic thought gave birth to the Babi movements which, in later years, severed their relationship with the mainstream of the community.

Whether it is the salafi movement, or the voices raised from the Hanafite camps, the fact is that all their efforts have failed to bring about any radical change in the conventional way of thinking. In principle, it was not difficult for the salafis to de-recognize the four canonized schools of sunni Islam but in practice stepping out of the long sanctified fiqhi boundaries was no easy task. There is no doubt that they have been successful in saving themselves from the 'speculations of people' (*aa'ra al-rijal*) produced by the four imams and their disciples, but their total dependence on traditions made them oblivious of the fact that the narrations of the times of the Prophet contained in the books of Hadith cannot be given any higher status than the human perceptions of the days and times of the Prophet. In their excessive zeal to deny the four imams, and in their search for an alternative they did not exercise the kind of judgment and circumspection that were the hallmarks of the latter-day jurists. It was conveniently ignored that all that is collected in the books of traditions are not exact and flawless reproduction of the prophet's time and that the traditionists themselves do not claim that among all these statements attributed to the Prophet, there can be a single statement that could be said to be a verbatim reproduction of what the Prophet had said. Nor is there a single report about which it can be claimed with certainty that it has preserved in its narrative structure the entire context of the particular moment in the Prophet's life in which the utterance was made, in all its dimensions. This is the reason why the voices of protest rising from the Hanbalite camps, despite their strength and rigor, had to ultimately rest content with a new kind of *taqlid*, even though this *taqlid* was not of the four imams but of the traditionists who compiled the six or nine canonized texts of traditions.

As for the Hanafite thinkers, even those among them who were voicing anxiety about the state of jurisprudence, and were strong supporters of some original thinking (*ijtihad*), did not have any clear idea about any specific kind of *ijtihad* and what would be its contours, nor did they have any idea about how far they could go in that

direction. They certainly registered their protest against the conventional jurisprudence that had got stagnant, and their criticism of the jurists who tried to find out the solution of all the problems of the world in the old and hoary books of jurisprudence could be incisive and bitter. However, these new enthusiasts of *ijtihad* were not equipped to do anything more than this. For them, *ijtihad* meant removing old idols and replacing them with new ones. In other words, they wanted to pave the way for a new Abu Hanifa or a new Shafei in the realm of Muslim thought. Rarely, if ever, do they express any doubts about the process of jurisprudence that led to the canonization of the four imams and in placing them in the position of religious leadership. They could not recognize the fact that the emergence of a new Abu Hanifa or a new Shafei would only lead to the establishment of newer schools of 'sacred' jurisprudence that would generate another crisis in the sphere of Muslim thought. The basis for the deviation of Muslim thought and the decline or erosion of jurisprudence cannot be traced back to individual jurists or personalities, but it should be located in the very process of jurisprudence. It is surprising that those clamoring for *ijtihad* did not feel the need to turn their attention to expose and debunk this process. On closer scrutiny, it appears that these enthusiasts of *ijtihad* who want to pave the way for the emergence of new imams in contemporary times and who are unable to recognize the inadequacies of the juristic process, ultimately come round to accepting the old jurisprudence in a new garb. There is no fundamental difference between them and the supporters of *taqlid* who believe that human intellect is no longer capable of absolute or perfect *ijtihad*. At the most, they will have to content themselves by drawing inferences from earlier instances of *ijtihad* or effecting only 'collateral' (*faru'i*) *ijtihad*, and that is all.<sup>208</sup> Muhammad Iqbal who did not make any secret of his dissatisfaction with Hanafite jurisprudence and who invited the Hanafite jurists to reconsider issues like divorce and *khula* (divorce initiated by wives), referring to the fate of those hapless Muslim women who, for obtaining *khula*, are compelled to take recourse to apostasy (*irtidad*).<sup>209</sup> Even he does not seem to be ready, in his famous address on *ijtihad*, to totally sever himself from conventional jurisprudence and its four cardinal principles. They opine that if *qiyas* and consensus are applied as general principle and instead of individual jurists, if the right to consensus is vested in an elected assembly, then a revolution could take place in the stagnant world of jurisprudence. It is another matter that Iqbal continued to remain preoccupied with these issues throughout his life as to what could be the frontiers of consensus and *qiyas*. We intend to discuss this issue in detail later. Despite all his tall claims about *ijtihad*, Iqbal not only accepts the four principles of jurisprudence as they were, without feeling any need

for a critical reassessment, but also regards Shatibi's 'five obligatory duties' as a valid and enduring principle. With reference to Shatibi, Iqbal says that the fundamental duty of jurisprudence is to safeguard four things: Faith, self (*nafs*), intellect, wealth and race.<sup>210</sup> This reverential attitude of Iqbal towards conventional schools of jurisprudence and their critical tools destroys all possibilities of change in the existing paradigm of thought. He proved to be like Shah Waliullah who, despite his blistering critique of the concept of the sacred jurisprudence, exhorted the believers to remain aligned with any one of them, and kept saying that the establishment of the four schools of jurisprudence was, in reality, willed by Allah. In the context of Muslim intellectual tradition, Iqbal fell a victim to the same idea. For him, the past is not only sacred but it is like a delicate and fragile entity. According to him, to take issue with the past not only meant expressing reservations about the process of knowledge, but going further than that and mounting an attack on the very foundations on which stood our intellectual heritage. This is so because Iqbal suffers from the misconception that if the consensus arrived at in the past is put under critical scrutiny, it would not only shake the foundations of jurisprudence but that the Qur'an itself would face danger. To convince people about the extraordinary importance of consensus, Iqbal also expresses the view that if the last two surahs of the Qur'an are included in it, it is due to the consensus arrived at by Islamic scholars.<sup>211</sup> This claim by Iqbal cannot be fully validated on the critical principles of history. In fact, this misunderstanding also had its genesis in reading history at the level of a sacred text. This attitude of reverence towards the past has transformed the pages of history into a fragile crystal glass for us rather than the place where one could draw lessons from. This particular understanding of history as a sacred entity has impelled us to believe that our juristic confusion and our division into four or more groups was, in fact, a Divine decision. How can any significant effort of *ijtihad* begin in an environment where human intellect is so much clouded by a fabricated concept of history?

There is no doubt about the fact that the enthusiasts of the movement for *ijtihad* had been able to raise some fundamental questions. If independent and impartial thinking on those questions had begun, it could have led to a new reawakening in the realm of Islamic thought that had grown stagnant. Iqbal was not the first thinker who had brought into the ambit of his thinking the second caliph Omer's juristic reflections and ideas. Of course, he is certainly the first in the sense that he tried to make some 'dangerous' and unsettling questions related to Omer's jurisprudence the basis of his enquiry. He said that when the Qur'an is the Complete Book, containing within itself materials for the guidance of humanity, it is incumbent upon us that we assess the life

of the non-Muslim communities purely on the basis of the Qur'anic perspective. The methods to be adopted for such an attempt became the subject of his serious reflection and enquiry. He also raised the question whether the Qur'anic injunction or *nass* can be overruled or suspended on the basis of consensus, as was advocated by some Hanafite scholars and the Mu'tazalites. For example, is it possible to bring about changes in the laws of inheritance in the light of changing circumstances in the contemporary times, or can one institute changes in the Qur'anic duration of two years for the weaning period, i.e. to increase or decrease the duration? He also raised the question as to how and on what basis the jurists have the right to infer from the Qur'an 'specific' and the 'general' injunctions and whether in doing so relying solely on *ijma* can be a legitimate option? Were such rights reserved only for the Prophet's Companions or the jurists, too, could exercise such rights? Iqbal also felt the need to reflect on the issue if the practice of any of the Prophet's Companions comes in conflict with the Qur'anic injunction, would it be proper to consider that the Qur'anic injunction stood abrogated and the Prophet's Companion knew about it? Whatever the Prophet said to the people in response to their queries – whether it was based on the Qur'an or his personal wisdom and insight – would both be equally valid? Iqbal also wanted to know how we should distinguish between the Revelation and the Prophet's tradition. Psychologically speaking, how should we define *wahi ghair matlu*? Whether the categories of *wahi ghair matlu* and *wahi matlu* were known during the Prophet's time or were they a product of the later ages? Muhammad was both a prophet and a leader. As a prophet he received Revelation and as the leader of the community, he took decisions on the basis of his wisdom and insight. Now, should his wisdom and insight also be regarded as a source of guidance like the Revelation? A single person can be placed in the seat of leadership, or a group of individuals can carry out that responsibility. Can the leader of the Muslims have the right to temporarily suspend Qur'anic instructions, as for instance, the chopping of hands of thieves? If he can do so, what could be its Qur'anic basis? Iqbal also interrogated Omer's steps related to triple divorce and raised questions about its Qur'anic basis. In other words, Iqbal wanted to know whether the constitution of the contemporary Islamic state gives its caliph or ruler such extensive rights. In the Hanafite jurisprudence, to determine the parentage of a child the time stipulated is up to two years from the birth of the child. What is the basis of such a law in shariah? Another question was whether it was permissible for the ruler of an Islamic state to temporarily suspend some obligatory duties? The general perception is that before Omer took over as the caliph, the 'muta' marriage was in vogue. Now, could the ruler of the Muslims

be given the right to take categorical decisions about the problems that cropped up in the contemporary society according to his own understanding and insight? We can make a list of the problems about which it can be said that the ruler can take such decisions according to these. Interrogating the conventional grouping of Islamic jurisprudence, Iqbal asked why is there such a great difference even in case of a continuous and uninterrupted method of worship like salah, among the Malekites, the Hanafites and the Shias?<sup>212</sup>

These questions certainly contained the seeds of immense possibilities. If they were made the subjects for serious investigation and reflections by the thinkers, a trend of new thinking could have emerged. But Iqbal was an expert only in brainstorming. He certainly knew how to ask sharp-edged questions but he, too, like those who were scared of the massive tomes of jurisprudence, did not show the same confidence in finding answers to his own questions. He was only too aware of the fact that our religious and juristic thinking required a new lease of life, but he himself did not possess direct knowledge about conventional jurisprudence, its sources and associated areas, nor did he try, in an organized fashion to excavate the massive volumes of jurisprudence to seek answers to his questions. Instead, he considered it wise to depend on Islamic scholars who neither wanted to share with him all information on Islamic knowledge,<sup>213</sup> nor did they want to give him the right to ijihad even while they called him the 'Poet of the East' and the 'thinker of Islam'. Syed Sulaiman Nadwi with whom Iqbal had extensive correspondences, where one finds lots of these questions, was not even ready to have Iqbal's English addresses published.<sup>214</sup> Abdul Majid Daryabadi, too, did not think highly of his address on ijihad.<sup>215</sup> Despite considering ijihad necessary in the context of the contemporary situation, the conventional Islamic scholars were not happy about Iqbal's efforts towards ijihad. One reason for this could have been that he presented most of his finding from the perspective of his study of Orientalism which left people with the impression that the roots of his questions were, perhaps, outside the intellectual tradition of Islam. Secondly, the draft of the elected assembly for the purpose of consensus in contemporary times that he had presented would have deprived individual ulema of the right to ijihad and vested it in the elected assembly. This was a thought that was interpreted by the ulema as the negation of their traditional role in the Muslim society, and they equated it with their disempowerment.

From the age of Ibn Hazm to our times, the movement for ijihad had passed through different phases. In these phases, if one had witnessed the denial of the stagnant jurisprudence one had also seen the efforts at compiling a new set of jurisprudence. However, our ulema are not yet ready to accept the fact that a new

compilation of jurisprudence could take place only when we are absolutely ready to abandon older juristic attitudes. In other words, the first step in this direction would require the deconstruction of conventional juristic thinking. This demands a total paradigm shift. As long as we are not able to lay the foundation of reflecting on the Revelation directly, without the aid of the juristic parameters, a new beginning is not only difficult but impossible. It is regrettable that our mujtahids who consciously advocate ijtiḥād very strongly, seem to be unprepared emotionally to take any such steps. This is the reason why the movement for ijtiḥād, despite all its pioneering initiatives, eventually remained a mere reformist movement.

The awareness that our religious thinking was undergoing a crisis and that it was needed that Islamic jurisprudence should be refurbished and reinvented had taken a strong hold on the mind and heart of some reformers in the beginning of the twentieth century who had initiated the movement for ijtiḥād or other reformist movements. Deep despair and a sense of gloom had enveloped the entire Muslim community, after being repeatedly vanquished and humiliated by the colonial powers. However, after the termination of the Caliphate it was reasonably expected that the time for the correction of earlier deviations in Islamic thinking had finally arrived. At every critical moment of history religious thinking that had taken on the garb of factionalism led to negative and harmful consequences. Be it the fall of Baghdad or Grenada, the sack of Delhi or the bloody incidents that marked the end of the caliphate of Othman – in all these critical moments it was clearly demonstrated that our juristic methods, rather than arresting the process of decline, had always accentuated it. Some people even make the quite valid point that the fall of our sovereign states, the sack of our cities, the pillage of kingdoms and the division of the Muslim community into different conflicting and competing groups took place only when our religious thinking was undergoing crisis and the community was engaged in narrow, factional fights on matters of jurisprudence.<sup>216</sup> That is why the new reformers tried to strike upon some compromise formula among different schools of jurisprudence. In the beginning of the twentieth century, some people vigorously advocated the case for ijtiḥād and their efforts took the form of reformist action. Whether such efforts were carried out in Egypt or Tunis, whether Iraq or the British India or the newly established country of Pakistan founded on Islam was its center, a common element found in the reformist movements taking place in all these countries was that they did not have any qualms in taking advantage of all the four schools of thought at a time. What else could be the reason for such a liberal attitude except the fact that these reformers looked upon jurisprudence as the human understanding and interpretation of the divine intent, and that is why they



tried their best to make these structures of human interpretation better and more effective and dared to keep the doors open for further reflections in order to bring jurisprudence in sync with the modern times. Egypt, which was a conventional stronghold of the Hanafite school of thought, brought in a law in 1920 under which the courts were given the right to take decisions on the issues of maintenance, *iddat* and missing persons/ spouses according to the Malekite and the Shafeiite jurisprudences.<sup>217</sup> In the new shariah laws of 1336 hijra in Syria, ways and means were devised to take advantage of all the four schools of thought on some specific issues. For example, wife was given the right to separation on grounds of lack of maintenance, and permanent sickness of the husband like lunacy, leprosy or consumption. For the missing husband, the duration of four years in normal times and one year during war situation was decided upon, after which the wife could seek separation. In the marriage law passed in 1953, known as *Qanoon Al-Ahwal Al-Shakhsiyah*, the minimum age for marriage was also decided, which was 17 years for girls and 18 for boys. According to the new laws, the second marriage is no longer a matter of the husband's whims. Instead, the courts have been given the final say in the matter. Laws governing divorce given in a drunken state, divorce by suggestion (*kinaya*), and revocable divorce were formulated on the basis of similar laws in Egypt. Uttering the word 'talaq' thrice at the same moment was regarded as just one utterance, and if the husband cannot provide for maintenance, the wife was given the right to ask for separation. As opposed to the Hanafite School of jurisprudence according to which the duration of weaning period is two years from the time of conception, the Hanbalite School reduced this duration to one solar year. Similar significant changes were effected in the laws of inheritance. Taking insights from the Zwahiri and the Hanbalite schools of thought it was considered for issueless parents to institute a will. Similar efforts at reform were discernible in the personal law of Tunis, 1957, which, to a large extent, represents a fine combination of the Malekite and the Hanafite jurisprudences. Here, the Muslim reformers declared having more than one wife absolutely illegal; at the same time, they declared all divorces taking place outside the court as invalid. For the missing husband, the waiting period for the wife was decided to be two years during war period while in normal times it should be left to the discretion of the judge. During Indo-British period, the blind imitation of the Hanafite jurisprudence compelled the wives to undergo a living hell waiting for their husbands endlessly. The situation was sought to be eased a little by taking recourse to the Malekite school of jurisprudence.<sup>218</sup> In 1939, on the demand made by Muslims, the law for the annulment of marriage was, in effect, the abrogation of the Hanafite jurisprudence by the Malekite jurisprudence. In the

personal law of Pakistan in 1961, the disagreements between different schools of thought were kept intact, where divorce was incorporated as revocable and the disinherited grandson was declared a rightful successor to his father's property.<sup>219</sup>

The efforts mounted through these reformist movements eased the situation created by excessive dependence on jurisprudence, even if temporarily. The impression that to lead a pious religious life it was necessary to follow any particular school dogmatically was also slowly eroded. However, these reformist movements could not lay the foundation of any serious, critical rethinking on the structures of jurisprudence and its methods. These reformist measures that had begun in the name of *ijtihad* that had taken on the garb of reformation had, basically, remained a prisoner of the conventional intellectual structures that could have produced only a *mujtahid-e forui* rather than a *mujtahid-e mutlaq*. Under these circumstances, the misconceptions that had crept into our thought through jurisprudence could not be redressed. The result was the stagnation that had overtaken our religious thinking, buttressed by the conventional methods of jurisprudence, remained as it was. The movement for *ijtihad* certainly invited people to rethink on many issues; however, people sought answers to these questions through the same conventional methods that had lost their relevance. Thus, not only that our religious thought remained a captive to the old, juristic worldview but also that we were not able to come out of the trap of 'people's speculations' (*aar'a al-rijal*) that had attained the status of *nass* in the old jurisprudence.

As we have pointed out, instead of seriously critiquing the principles of jurisprudence and its methods, all the efforts of the *mujtahids* were directed towards sorting out collateral issues. Thus, when they tried to solve new problems according to the older methods of interpretation it gave rise to fairly ludicrous situations. For example, when the changing social situations required that we use modern appliances right inside mosques, jurists engaged themselves in serious disputes as to whether the use of the loudspeaker should be allowed or not.<sup>220</sup> They began to debate whether the voice coming out of the microphone was indeed the original voice or its echo or a new form of the voice saved earlier. In the older texts one could find people conducting debates in similar idioms. Similarly, regarding infusion of blood in the body of a sick person, the jurists raised the objection that from a juristic point of view, if blood is considered to be filth, how could it be allowed that it should be infused in a believer's body?<sup>221</sup> It is said that it could be permissible only in the extreme situation of the patient facing death without it, because they already had the precedent of even pig's meat being permissible to eat in such an extreme situation. Taking injection in the state of fasting also came under the juristic scanner and

jurisprudents thought it necessary to reflect on the issue in the light of the hoary juristic formulations. According to them, the entire human physique was divided into three parts, the body, the mind and the belly, according to the terms applied specifically by the jurisprudents, and then it was said that because the impact of injection is felt on the body and not on the stomach, there could be no doubt about its being permissible. It was also argued that just as the insertion of medicine, oil etc in the penis of a man does not lead to the breaking of the fast, as corroborated by the three imams, in case of injection also the same rule would apply: كما شرح به الشامي حيث قال: وأفاد انه لو ألقى في قصبه الذكر لا يفسد اتفاقاً ولا شك في ذلك. Further, it was said that even if the medicine reaches the bladder, the fasting would not be affected, as declared by Abu Hanifa and Imam Muhammad. As for the fact that Abu Hanifa considered the fast to be broken if the medicine enters the bladder, the reason for this is his awareness that between the stomach and the bladder is an orifice through which the medicine could reach the stomach. As jurisprudence continued to move in its old framework, it had to be subservient to the medical information that was available to the earlier generations. Some people said the ear also contains an orifice and the fast is not affected if water enters through it, as declared by the author of *Durre Mukhtar*, or as it is written in *Alamgiri*: وفي دواء الجافة والأمة أكثر المشايخ على أن العبرة للوصول إلى الجوف الدماغ. According to their old understanding of the human body, the jurisprudents reached the conclusion that for nullification of the fast it was necessary that whatever is poured or infused from outside must reach the stomach or the brain. Secondly, this passing of the liquid should be through the natural passage (and not by artificial means). Apart from this, any other mechanical insertion or infusion of anything into the stomach or the brain would not affect the fast. According to this understanding of the human body, to lessen the severity of the fast by means of glucose injection was similar to the act of trying to quench one's thirst in scorching heat by taking bath in cold water.<sup>222</sup>

Whether it is the issue of using loudspeaker during salah, or hearing the recitation of the Qur'an on the gramophone, whether it is the curiosity of the believers about the art of photography or the arguments of shariah in favour of film making, whether it is the confirmation of the sighting of the moon on telephone or paying of zakat through bank note – about all such new problems that cropped up from time to time, the jurisprudents thought it incumbent upon them to take help from old thought structures derived from old books in their attempts to find solutions to them. Then, since in the process of the compilation and drawing of shariah arguments, the old method of identifying cause and effect was still in vogue, and on top of it, spurious scientific information and the inferences derived from it had turned shariah into a

playground for children. For example, the use of loudspeaker was first considered to be impermissible, and the voice coming through it was declared to be an echo. However, when this thesis was debunked then edicts were issued in support of its use, although the leaders of the Deoband School continued to be bitter about it.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, the recitation of the Qur'an on the gramophone or radio was first accepted quite reluctantly. And doubts still remained as to the acceptance of a telephonic message as genuine. But as all these elements/appliances became an inalienable part of modern life, our jurisprudence gradually brought them within the ambit of *mubah*, the permissible. The old structures of thought continued to dominate the mind of the jurists even when they were seeking solutions to modern problems. Consequently, even while reflecting on the contemporary problems, we were never willing to come out of the old juristic structures. It seemed as though our religious thought had a kind of allergy to anything new, and every new discovery was a kind of mortal blow to our juristic system. It was as though the Islamic Faith and its adherents belonged to an old world, and the new inventions and discoveries were making life more and more difficult for them.

As jurisprudence was considered to be the genuine expression of religious thought, the view of life projected by it had, to a great extent, made our religious thought a prisoner of the ancient world, a world where it was yet to be decided as to what sort of knowledge was meant when it was said that in the rise and fall of nations, a key role was played by knowledge and wisdom, thought and reflection. Because, in the juristic view of life, knowledge had already got divided. Jurisprudence was declared to be the finest and the most sublime expression of religious knowledge. But as the jurists often awfully lacked knowledge about the real world, they were often led to ludicrous edicts. It was quite natural that when the edict-givers did not have proper knowledge of the modern appliances, they had to depend on second-hand information before issuing their edicts. However, despite this clear inadequacy of the juristic concept of Faith, they hardly, if ever, felt the necessity of revisiting it. The Israelites, during the two centuries of their downfall, kept on believing in and acting upon the assumption that the highest form of knowledge was the knowledge of the Torah, and they considered it their life's mission to acquire the knowledge of Torah, to model their lives on this knowledge and to serve it (Torah) in all possible ways. As a result of this static and limited understanding, they gradually moved away from subjugating the forces of nature, their role in worldly affairs became minimal. As in the case of the Israelites, the juristic interpretation of religion has led Muslims, too, away from acquisition of secular knowledge. The strangest thing was that, in the name of religious

knowledge, even the Book of God was relegated to a secondary position. It was thought enough that some religious rituals should be learnt by heart. As far as the interpretation of the Faith is concerned, the dominance of 'people's views' over the Revelation had already been established, which meant that the basic contours of the collective life had become dependent upon the personal likes and dislikes of individual jurists. For example, some jurists of the Hanafite School (e.g. Mulla Ali Qari) wrote articles against teaching women the art of writing, and in deference to his opinion, the jurists of later periods declared that it was not permissible for women to learn the art of writing. Many such topics were introduced in the books of jurisprudence the main purpose of which was to deprive women of any role in the collective life of the community. Restrictions were imposed on their entry into mosques. On top of everything, the jurists prepared a long list of qualifications for anyone who wanted to access the Qur'an directly. Without a certain level of mastery in those areas direct access to the Qur'an was considered to be undesirable. As times passed by, the jurists went on making additions to this list of qualifications. When it came to the period of Jalaluddin Sayuti, as he has written in *Itqaan*, for direct access to the Book of Guidance, expertise in 25 subjects was considered necessary, without which an understanding of the Qur'an was not considered possible. All these restrictions were imposed to prevent the emergence of any new thinking in the field, the practical and psychological implication of which was to maintain the dominance of old-style jurisprudence. If all the subversive movements taking place within jurisprudence eventually turned out to be the extension of conventional thinking, this is because jurisprudence had set up such a standard for the perfect mujtahid which, though apparently, seemed to be waiting eagerly for the coming of a mujtahid had, in effect, wiped out any possibility of the emergence of any such being.

Jurisprudence had now acquired the status of the most genuine manifestation of religious knowledge, and the strength and vitality of Muslim thinking depended on its revival. And the process of this revival was not possible without the direct intervention of the Revelation which, unfortunately, the jurists had made extremely difficult to access not only by common people but even greatly learned individuals, because of the rigorous condition they had imposed (viz., knowledge of as many as 25 subjects). In the intellectual history of Muslims one does not find reference to a single person who had the same level of expertise in all the 25 subjects. As for the great jurists and the famous traditionists of the earlier ages, the fact of the matter is that many of these subjects had not yet emerged as independent disciplines during their times. The largely juristic and non-rational attitude that we adopted towards the Qur'an had

effectively suspended it. All the activities of life were now decided in the light of the books of jurisprudence and they were considered more than sufficient for the organization and conduct of our religious life. The Qur'an, despite its physical presence everywhere, had vanished from sight and mind of the believers, as it had now been turned into a mere book of benediction. In these circumstances, to restore the Qur'an in its rightful position and to establish it once again in the mind and heart of the people it was necessary that all the fabricated and 'practiced' versions of it be folded up once for all. But the problem was the jurists had effectively blocked any such possibility. Fazlur Rahman has rightly pointed out that the conventional Islamic scholars, because of their antiquated system of education and training and the juristic concept of Islam were not in a position to recognize and appreciate the problems facing Muslims in the modern period. On the other side, the Muslim intellectuals who were not Islamic scholars were not confident enough to lay the foundation of a new jurisprudence.<sup>224</sup> This observation of Fazlur Rahman is certainly true, even if partially. However, in our opinion, the idea that the Muslim intellectuals who were not scholars of Islam should have tried to revitalize Muslim thought is debatable. In the modern times, too, those who were the strongest advocates of the reconstruction of religious thoughts in Islam had their minds dominated by juristic concepts, could not conceive of a system of thought in Islam that would be independent of juristic thinking. For example, like any other modernist, Iqbal, too, depended on the Qur'anic statement – ان تعدلوا to adduce arguments against polygamy, by pointing out that the real intent of the verse was to promote monogamy because, in practical life, it is not possible to be equally just to all the wives at the same time. If we look at it closely, we will find that our modern thinkers, even though they were dissatisfied with the old juristic framework and which they considered to be a hindrance to a proper understanding of the Book of Guidance, did not consider it necessary to read the Qur'an rising above the tone and tenor of jurisprudence. The community does not need a new jurisprudence, but a new re-reading of the Book of Guidance, a reading that would enable us to get out of the strait-jacket of the conventional juristic framework. For example, the Qur'anic verse – [4:34] الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ – does not contain any absolute juristic law that establishes the superiority of husbands over wives, but this is conditional upon the social system of the time when women were totally dependent on men for economic support. However, if the circumstances in the society change and women become economically independent, men certainly hold on to their privileged position. The study of Qur'anic verses in a non-juristic framework not only makes us aware of the timeless and refreshing dimension of its

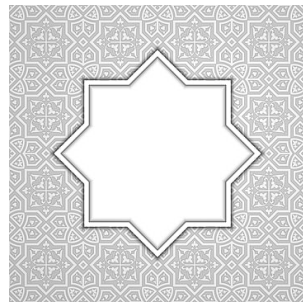
meanings, but the reader of the sacred pages feels a kind of light that has the capacity to illuminate dark pathways in his mind. As opposed to this, the juristic reading of the Book of Guidance presents the verses revealed in Mecca and those revealed in Medina as contradicting or competing with one another, and then the attempt by the jurists to arrive at a synthesis (*tatbeeq*) left them with no other option except declaring the verses revealed in Mecca as abrogated by those revealed at Medina which were given the status of abrogators. Thus, despite the presence of a verse in the Qur'an, we approve its abrogation, and alienate ourselves psychologically from it. What should have been done, in fact, was to undertake a study of the verse unfettered by juristic thinking. If it had been so, it would not have been difficult to understand the verses revealed in Mecca in Meccan paradigm and those revealed in Medina in the Medinite paradigm. The reader would not have experienced any sense of contradiction, nor would he have fallen a victim to the misconception that many of the verses of the Qur'an had become abrogated (May Allah save us from such thoughts!), which need not be followed or adhered to. For example, among the surahs revealed in Mecca where, in an atmosphere of extraordinary emphasis on patience and perseverance, people were exhorted to 'keep their hands tied' (كُفُّوا أَيْدِيَكُمْ), it should be taken as a beacon light in a situation when the believers are in a weak position and an atmosphere of conflict would not benefit them in any way. But when the situation changes, and the believers, through resolving their conflicts, are in a stronger position to vanquish the enemy, then the believers should seek light from those verses that exhort them to challenge the enemy [9:5]. As the Qur'an is the Perfect Book, it must contain principles of guidance for all possible and potential situations. Thus, there is no reason why the difference in the tone and tenor of different verses or the seeming difference in injunctions should not be seen in their contextual paradigm, rather than the binaries of the abrogator and the abrogated. And then, in the name of the quest for abrogated verses, a group of specialists should establish their monopoly in the Book of Guidance. The real need is to look at the Qur'an as the source of guidance and light and not as a book of juristic formulations. As long as people continue to study it through the juristic prism, they would not be able to internalize the message of the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an stipulates the establishment of a just society where there will be no exploitation of human beings, the downtrodden are looked after well; it envisages a society where there will be no slave and no slave-holder. The statement – 'وَكَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا' envisages an environment where there is no scope for a jurisprudence that formulated a regular law for the perpetuation of the institution of slavery, because when the Muslim society reaches its evolutionary destination, this kind of social and

psychological inequality would be thrown into the trashcan of history. It will certainly be surprising to those who are interested in reading the Qur'an as the book of jurisprudence that if these institutions cease to exist where would one apply the Qur'anic commandment contained in the above verse. Some Muslim thinkers, among whom Fazlur Rahman figures prominently, have reached the conclusion that in our search for the crux of the Qur'an, if we undertake fresh studies on the sequence of the revelation of the Qur'anic verses, it might yield new insights. They believe that such an attempt would help us understand the basic impulse of the Islamic movement, and as a consequence of which we would be able to distinguish between Qur'anic legal dicta, its main aim and objectives.<sup>225</sup> There is no doubt that recognizing the main objective of the Revelation would help us derive light and guidance from the Qur'anic verses in the contemporary times. However, the search for this supposed chronological order is fraught with the danger that we would once again be thrown into the trap of history from which we must try our best to wriggle out. The crux of the Revelation should be understood not through history but must emanate from within the Qur'anic paradigm. The process has the potential strength to gain the confidence of all the different schools of thought in Islam. There is no doubt that the hedge built around the Book of Guidance can be broken only through a non-juristic process. Also, there is no doubt about the fact that for gaining direct access to the Qur'an there is no other way except that we must wade through the writings and reflections of jurists and exegetes accumulated over several centuries and reach the time when the Qur'anic light illuminated the path of the Muslims of the first generation. Without this we cannot lay the foundation of a new religious thinking. However, while doing this we must keep in mind that in our attempt to discard the tone and idiom of the conventional jurisprudence or in our negative reaction to it we should not give birth to a new mode of juristic thinking. Otherwise, our efforts will also eventually lead to the establishment of a society governed by jurisprudence which is certainly a step in the way of the Qur'anic objective but not its final destination.



SECTION VI

# Islamic Mysticism



# The Qur'anic Revelation hedged in by Esoteric Sciences

﴿ وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾

The birth of mysticism in Islam was like the emergence of a new Faith. It was the same kind of process (of abrogation) that the Israelites had already effected in the case of the Torah. The outgrowth of a new Faith could not be possible without the abrogation and suspension of the Divine Revelation. The mystics had effected this task on several planes. They did not rest content merely with the quest of the esoteric meanings, but also gave new meanings to the familiar terms used in the Qur'an, and this resulted in the insertion of alien ideas into the Divine Text. The mystical interpretation of these terms got so entrenched with the passage of time that even the commentaries by the opponents of mysticism could not shake off the impact of this interpretive tradition.

## ESOTERIC MEANING

There can be no better ways of abrogating the Divine Revelation and hedging its meanings except taking the plea of the search for esoteric meanings. This process paved the way for readers for reading their own meanings in the divine verses. The mystics concocted the belief that 'the Qur'an consists of the two layers of meanings, the manifest and the hidden, and its core lies in the hidden' (ان القرآن ظاهرا وباطنا والمراد باطنه).<sup>1</sup> To strengthen this view a fabricated tradition was brought to the fore regarding the Qur'an according to which the Prophet had stated — ما من آية إلا ولها ظاهرٌ وباطنٌ وحلٌّ — ومطلع. Some people even said that though Allah has closed the door of Prophethood, however, He has kept the door of *fahm* (esoteric insight into the revelation) open. It was also stated, with reference to Ali, that after the termination of the Divine Revelation we are now left with nothing except the esoteric insight into the Qur'an, and it is up to Allah to bless whoever He wants with this insight.<sup>2</sup> The plea of exploring the hidden meanings of the Qur'an provided a certain legitimacy to the mystics to undertake whimsical and subjective interpretation of the Qur'an.

This tradition was also brought to the fore, with reference to Abdullah bin Abbas that if he commented on the verse – [65:12] *اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ* – then people would throw stones at him, or they would call him (Abdullah bin Abbas) a kafir.<sup>3</sup> Bukhari has recorded the tradition recorded by Abu Hurairah according to which Abu Hurairah had reported: 'The Prophet gave me two sealed containers. One I have uncovered and made public. If I open the other, then I am afraid, my jugular vein may be slit.'<sup>4</sup> Reports of this kind strengthen the belief that the Qur'an is much more mysterious and enigmatic than it appears to us; in fact, it is a treasure house of mysteries and real knowledge cannot be achieved without exploring those mysteries. And this impression was widespread about the hidden knowledge that, firstly, the Prophet imparted it to those who were closest to him, and according to some reports the first recipients of this knowledge were Abu Bakr and Ali. Secondly, the mystics traced the history of this esoteric knowledge (*ilm-e ladunni*) back to the fictional character<sup>5</sup> of Khizr. According to them, the personality referred to by Moses in his discourses as 'a slave among the slaves' (*فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا*), and about whom it was believed that he possessed prophetic knowledge was none other than Khizr himself.' Ali also had a special importance in the context of hidden knowledge and the stories about how many mystics benefited from his knowledge became a matter of public perception. The matter reached to such a point that even those Islamic scholars who had come on the scene with the declared purpose of the revival of the Faith felt it necessary to derive the authority of the hidden knowledge from Ali, if not from Khizr.<sup>6</sup>

If the misconceptions created by the hidden or the esoteric knowledge provided some Shia groups with the opportunity to give birth to a new Faith, the mystics of the Sunni persuasion also did not lag behind in extracting benefits from such specialized knowledge. When once it was accepted, on principle, that – *أن للعلم ظاهرا وباطنا وللقرآن ظاهرا* – *وباطنا ولحديث رسول الله ظاهرا وباطنا*<sup>7</sup> it was natural that people would take extraordinary interest in trying to trace out this hidden Qur'an and hidden meanings in traditions of the Prophet.

The esoteric interpretations of the Qur'an helped the mystics to read their own intellectual predilections into the Qur'an. So much so that the Qur'an was made the practicing board for even patently alien and non-Qur'anic ideas. For example, it was said about the Qur'anic verse 'And We have created you from this (i.e. earth), and We will take you back into it, and then take you out of it again' (*مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا* ) (*نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى*) that it described the philosophy of the monoism (*wahdatul wajud*), i.e., all of us have been born of the One and will again be merged into it, then we will gain eternal life and will be born again from the same.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Arabi, the father of Islamic

mysticism, saw the phrase *alhamdulillah*, as illustrating the philosophy of pantheism. According to him, the phrase *alhamdulillah* signifies such absolute praise where the admirer and the admired, the God and the devotee, and the beginning and the ending become one.<sup>9</sup> Through their esoteric interpretations the Sufis have tried to provide Qur'anic bases for all their deviations in the realm of thoughts and imagination. For example, in the surah Baqarah the statement – *وَأَذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا هَدَاكُمْ* – was taken to mean a kind of meditation (*zikr*) that was purely the fanciful creation of the fanatic sufis. It was said that the above statement suggested six kinds of meditation – that of body, of heart, of head, of soul, the hidden *zikr* and lastly, of self.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the concluding verses of the same surah were exploited to provide arguments in support of the philosophy of pantheism. It was said that the prayer – *عَفْرَانِكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ* – really meant the following: 'O God, help us and our attributes, and please merge our existence and attributes with Yours!' *انصر لنا وجوداتنا وصفاتنا وامحها بوجودك ووجود صفاتك وإليك*, i.e., O Almighty! Purify our existence of sin, as our existence itself is the greatest sin. Ibn Arabi has declared human existence to be the greatest sin and tried to explain it through the relationship of the lover and the beloved. In his words, in the eyes of the beloved the greatest sin of the lover is his existence itself which is not comparable to any other sin. Similar is the case of human existence trying to define itself apart from God that cannot be redressed without its merger in Him.<sup>11</sup> There is no other way of atoning for this great sin except losing oneself in Him (*fana fillah*) or, in one's self (*fana fil-zaat*). This is the process that the Sufis have designated as the greater jihad (*jihad-e Akbar*), and not only that the following fabricated tradition – *رجعنا من الجهاد الأصغر إلى الجهاد الأكبر*<sup>12</sup> was brought to the fore but justification was sought to be provided for this view with the help of the esoteric interpretation of the verse on jihad in the Qur'an. Thus, while commenting on the Qur'anic verse – *يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ* – [5: 54], Ibn Arabi wrote: 'بمحو صفاتهم وإفناء ذواتهم' (يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ) أي: *بمحو صفاتهم وإفناء ذواتهم*.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, for the Sufis the real jihad is to merge their own self and attributes with the Divine Self and Attributes. And in doing so they should not care about the condemnations of others or the edicts of apostasy and infidelity passed on them. This concept of the existence of two Qur'ans – one apparent and the other hidden – would lead one to the natural assumption that the real access to the Qur'an and its core or soul cannot be possible without an access to its hidden meanings, particularly when some renowned scholars were adamant on insisting that some sciences were like mystical secrets and that they could only be unveiled by rigorous self-denial and not by available discipline of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the hidden or esoteric knowledge gaining credibility, the genuine Faith got distorted. Not only that, misconceptions were created about the communicative potential of the Qur'an, but it was declared that the Qur'an would be reduced to a mere structure devoid of meaning without the interventions of the Sufis. The allegation against the Prophet that he imparted this esoteric knowledge to some specific individuals cast a shadow of doubt over his duties of Prophethood. The advocates of the hidden meanings ignored the Qur'anic stipulation where along with the commandment of – بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ – he was exhorted – وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ –. The Sufis have accorded this fabricated tradition the status of an established one in which Ali is said to have reported that the Prophet had instructed him into the seventy levels of knowledge and that none else had any clue to this knowledge except him.<sup>15</sup>

In the coming years this belief also became common that the tradition of hidden knowledge could be traced back to the Prophet through Ali. Of course, many mystics claimed this esoteric knowledge through reference to Khizr. Some claimed that they had illuminated their hearts with Allah's grandeur through their own spiritual exercises. In the words of Abu Talib Makki – هذا هو العلم النافع الذي بين العبد وبين الله تعالى وهو –<sup>16</sup> Giving precedence to the hidden knowledge over the apparent knowledge he also said: فضل العلم الباطن على الظاهر كفضل الملكوت على الملك.<sup>17</sup> As the hidden knowledge gained upper hand, the centrality enjoyed by the Divine Revelation and its text was gradually lost. The belief gained ground that there were two ways of reaching Allah: one was through the Divine Revelation and instruction of prophets, and the second one was through inspiration and spiritual attainments shown by the spiritual leaders.<sup>18</sup> When this belief gained ground that the devotees could work out their way of salvation through their own mystic capabilities and piety, then the need for the Prophet did not remain as paramount as before, nor the Qur'an enjoyed the same centrality as it did earlier. Now the Sufis were ensconced on the seat of prophethood because of their supposed spiritual attainments. Firstly, they claimed to hold the key to the meaning of the Qur'an because of their esoteric knowledge; secondly, in comparison with a dead prophet they considered themselves to have greater claim to the seat of prophethood. Thus, they claimed, as is evident from the statement by Bayazid Bustami: أخذتم علمكم عن الميت وأخذنا علمنا عن الحي الذي لا يموت.<sup>19</sup> As the claimants of the hidden knowledge held the view that the source from which the Prophet and the mystics drew was the same. In the words of Ibn Arabi: إنه أخذ من المعدن الذي يأخذ منه الملك الذي يولي به إلى الرسول.<sup>20</sup> i.e., the source from which the prophet draws is the same from which mystics also draw. Thus, it was only natural that in later years, new 'prophets' would emerge through Sufism. Ibn Arabi's claim that 'Allah spoke to my heart' (حدثني قلبي عن ربي), or the frequent

occurrence of the phrase 'My Lord revealed to me' (ألهمني ربي) in Shah Waliullah's writings demonstrate the fact that though these claimants to prophethood rated their quality of inspiration (*ilham*) a little lower than that of the Prophet's, nevertheless they claimed to have the opportunity to communicate with Allah directly. They went a step further and placed themselves in a position that was not enjoyed even by the prophets. It was said that when the heart of a mystic was purged of all impurities, it became like a mirror where they could see the 'Protected Tablet' (لوح محفوظ) reflected in it.<sup>21</sup> Some even asserted that the mystics saw in the dream state what the prophets saw in the state of wakefulness.<sup>22</sup>

Not only that these claimants of the hidden knowledge read their own meanings into the Qur'an and rendered it inaccessible to the common people, but some went even further and triggered a chain of compiling Qur'ans on mystical lines. The annals and records of the Sufis and their writings became the sources of hidden knowledge which were accepted by the apprentice mystics as the means to attain the highest state of spirituality. Just as the books of jurisprudence, by accumulating the utterances and statements of jurists, had transformed the Qur'an from the Book of Guidance into a book of laws, and just as the way the books of jurisprudence had supplanted the Qur'an as the means of guidance in the practical life of the people, in the same way the annals of the Sufis had gained the status of a practical guide to the highest spiritual attainments. Now, as the belief had gained ground that these annals provided a clue to the hidden knowledge contained in the Qur'an, those who aspired after the lofty spiritual attainments felt no attraction for the Qur'an. It was the same kind of situation that obtained among the Israelites in the context of Cabbalistic literature according to which the soul of the Torah lay hidden in its esoteric meanings. The revelation of the Torah took place at seventy levels of voices and sounds. This was the secret revealed on the Mount Sinai which was now revealing the attributes of Godhood in *Sefirot* in the form of *Malakut*. According to this thought, those who wanted to witness the Truth should not make any distinction between the letters of Torah, the beautiful names and the microcosm and macrocosm in the universe. If the mystic could follow it, then he would feel that the beautiful names and the sacred letters and voices had indeed begun to act upon his own being.<sup>23</sup>

## QUR'AN

### THE BOOK OF GUIDANCE OR A BOOK OF MYSTICAL LETTERS?

The excessive predilection for the word 'be' (*kun*) among the mystics led to a kind of letter-worship. Very soon, the idea got about that the Qur'an was, in fact, a unique

arrangement of mystical letters. The letters were everything, and the secrets contained in the letters held the key to the divine secrets. The names of Allah, too, were arrangements of letters in different combinations. So, what were of real worth were the letters as they encompassed all kinds of meanings. This letter-worship by the mystics transformed the Qur'an into a book that contained letters in mysterious combinations. It was now given out that its real meanings did not reside in the words, and that the apparent or manifest meanings were not taken to be the real meanings of the Book of Guidance, because now the entire emphasis was on unraveling the mystery of letters which, according to the Sufis, Allah revealed only to His chosen mystics. The mystics established their monopoly over the meanings of the Qur'an which, in their perception, had become a mere collection of mysterious letters. They declared it in no uncertain terms that the letters contained all spirituality, that God's pronouncements were couched in these letters, and hence the spirituality contained in them was manifest in external realities.<sup>24</sup> It was also said that the verses of blessings in the Qur'an was a kind of benediction for the researchers, and similarly, the verses on penalty or retribution were a kind of punishment for them. It was also said that the letters containing points or dots were inauspicious whereas those without dots were auspicious. Further, the letters containing one dot were closer to the auspicious state, the letters containing two dots were in the middle state whereas the letters containing three dots were 'highly inauspicious' (نحس أكبر).<sup>25</sup> The knowledge of this esoteric dimension of the letters was declared by the mystics to be the secrets of Godhead and in the light of this potential significance of letters invited people to read the Qur'an as the Book of Letters.

In the seventh century hijra, as a result of the combined efforts of Ali Al-Buni (d.622 hijra), Ibn Arabi (d.638 hijra) and Ibn Talha Al-Advi (d.652 hijra) the Qur'an was dislodged from its original status of the supreme Book of Guidance and began to be read in the circle of the mystics as a text book of white magic. The endeavor to subdue the elements of the world through the secret powers of Qur'anic letters was designated as 'permissible magic' (مباح سحر). And then the extreme Sufis tried to peddle their own self-invented secret meanings of the Qur'an as part of the conventional and established Muslim thought. Although these mystics were believers in the philosophy of monism (*wahdatul wajud*), their belief was that everything emanated from the One, and that the letters contained in themselves the hidden force that ran through the universe, and that these letters have emanated from the Names of God. That is why the world of elements could be subdued through the Names of God, provided the mystics used them with extreme care and caution. This particular concept about the letters was borrowed from the Cabalistic literature of the Jews. However, the Islamic mystics tried



to trace the underpinnings of such a concept within the Qur'an, and presented the Holy Book as the 'Secret Treasure of Great Letters'. That is why this alien thought, despite all its negative implications, could not be dismissed out of hand as non-Qur'anic. This was also because Ibn Arabi had claimed to discover the basis for this concept of the secrets of letters through the Qur'anic word *kun*, i.e., 'be'. The mystics who considered the Qur'an to be the collection of mysterious letters focused their attention on some specific letters as possessing occult potentials. Among them was the *alif* of the word 'Allah' whose pillar-like shape was said to be a symbol of the Almighty's supreme greatness. Similarly, the letter *meem* of the word 'Muhammad' received particular attention from them. It was asserted that the status of *bism* is great because of the presence of *meem* in it whose numerical strength is 40, which is a proof of its seminal importance. By adducing to the statement – حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَسَدُّهُ وَبَلَغَ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً – it was argued that the letter *meem* was a letter that had attained supreme potential, that is why if a person looked at it 40 times a day there would be benediction of all kinds and plentitude in his family forever.<sup>26</sup> It was also asserted that it was the letter *meem* that completed the phrase *bismillah*.<sup>27</sup> Sketches were also made with reference to this letter and people were exhorted to keep these with them for success in worldly affairs.<sup>28</sup> It was claimed that even if one among the many secret powers of this letter got manifested in someone then he could witness strange spectacles of the world<sup>29</sup>. More or less similar claims were made on behalf of other letters too. For example, about the letter *ba* (the second letter of the Arabic alphabet) it was claimed that it meant – بي ما كان وبي ما يكون i.e., 'with me was whatever was; and with me will be whatever will be'.<sup>30</sup> It was also claimed that if one wrote *bismillah* (that begins with *ba*) and tied it to his arm, it would invoke secret benedictions and help from angels.<sup>31</sup> It was further said that the prayers made through the letter 'ha' (the penultimate letter of the Arabic alphabet) were more likely to be granted by Allah. Prayers, too, were fabricated, of the kind in which it was said without any reservations – اللهم إني أسئلك بالهاء – Mysterious, incomprehensible and unexplainable charts were also drawn with reference to this letter that was declared to be an elixir for the admiration of the believers.<sup>32</sup> All kinds of speculations were also made about the seven letters of the Arabic alphabet not occurring in surah Fatiha. They were declared to be outside surah Fatiha and efforts were made to determine their special potentials. It was asserted that the seven letters not included in surah Fatiha were, in effect, letters of torment and by using them one could inflict sufferings and punishment on enemies.<sup>33</sup>

The special powers of the letters, their hot and cold properties and their state of being wet or dry, and the determination of their numerical values have been important

issues for the Sufis. However, for validating these secrets pertaining to the Qur'an, they are nearly unanimous in their dependence on the family of Ali. It was said that the secret interpretations of the Qur'an that had passed from Ali to Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq consisted of those secrets and mysteries through which one could forecast the future. A fabricated text, named as *Kitab Al-Jafr* was also attributed to Jafar Al-Sadiq and it was claimed that this book contained forecasts about the sufferings and challenges that the Prophet's family would undergo in the coming years. From this some people traced the birth of *Ilm-e Jafr* to Jafar Al-Sadiq. However, the fact remains that all these speculations about the mystical powers of letters in the Qur'an have been derived from sources that were absolutely alien to Islam. This is the reason why information coming from diverse external sources has made the science of numbers extremely complicated and controversial. For example, the hidden powers of *abjad* (numerical values of letters) and 'Beautiful Names', *hisab-al-jumal* (i.e., the numerical value of a name that is intended to be kept hidden), *al-kasr wal-bast* (i.e., establishing affinity between the letters occurring in a sacred name to the name of the person undertaking a prayer or task), and the disagreement about the value of letters among the mystics demonstrate the fact that those who are given to deciding about the numerical value of letters in the Qur'an or exploring the secrets of letters, had different sources of inspiration. As a matter of fact, the concepts that were in vogue among the Hindus and the Israelites about the mysterious powers of letters and numbers and the beliefs that were prevalent in the ancient times among people regarding magic and astronomy/astrology and how nature could be conquered through them, had their impact on the minds of these mystics. The result was – because of the different arrangements of alphabets available in *Jafr Al-Kabir*, *Jafr Al-Sagheer* and *Jafr Al-Mutawassit* not only that they offer differing values to letters that seriously affect interpretations but also raise questions about the prevalent science of numbers that depended on the division of letters into two groups, namely 'solar letters' (*huroof-e shamsi*) and 'lunar letters' (*huroof-e qamri*). Any synthesis between them becomes difficult. This complicated and divisive state of affairs compelled many of the practitioners of this art to admit that (in the words of Haji Khalifa) only Mahdi, the last imam, would be able to decipher their true meanings.<sup>34</sup>

The efforts at locating the secret and mystical meanings of letters in the Qur'an that had been spread over at least a thousand years could not become the means for the quest for God, nor the mystics could arrive at any definitive meaning of the secrets regarding the numerical value of letters and their potentials when they are arranged in different combinations. During this long period that is said to have begun with Al-

Hallaj and then spread over centuries, we do not find a single incident that could be corroborated through historical evidence and it could be claimed that by unraveling the power of 'be' (كن), the mystics had been able to explore any new universe or that they had been able to subdue the natural/supernatural forces of the present-day universe through the hidden powers of letters. On the contrary, it so happened that these efforts at different times to uncover the meaning of the Qur'an created the misconception in people's mind that it is not the Book of Guidance but that it contained secret information about divine powers, and that if one could gain access to them, then he would not only attain salvation but would gain immediate dominance over the universe. This idea about the Qur'an was, in fact, a negation of its real objective and it amounted to a suspension of its functional role. Once this misconception about its secret potential entered the Muslim mind, then it began to be used for purposes for which it was not revealed. In some countries of Africa and the Turkish empire with the objective of foretelling the future, the text of the Qur'an published by Hafiz Usman in the form of loose sheets gained notoriety, as now the Qur'an had been reduced to a text that was being used for soothsaying and foretelling, and that had gained the status of being the foundational text of making amulets and exercising charms.

The prevalent misconceptions about the secrets of letters and their supposed numerical powers left their impact on the minds of the common people. Among the mystics, the supposed divine words (*Hadith-e qudsi*), انا أحمد بلا ميم, led them to conjure up strange notions about God and His Being. Some opined that the combined numerical value of *alif*, *lam* and *fa* stood at 111 (*alif* = 1, *lam* = 30 and *fa* = 80). This numerical value of 111 was, in fact, equal to that of *alif* = 1 of Allah, *meem* = 40 of Muhammad and *ain* = 70 of Ali, all of which add up to 111. Some groups of mystics attached special significance to the number 19. According to them, it confirmed the concept of the Unity of God while other groups saw in the value 111 of *hu* (ha and *wao*) the grandeur of basmalah. The application of the numerical value in the case of the Qur'anic verses required human efforts for centuries. In the beginning, Hallaj and his contemporaries had begun to unravel the secrets of dotted letters about which one got preliminary references in *Kitab Al-Tawaseen*. In the later years, it assumed the form of a reliable means of Qur'anic knowledge.

Slowly, this supposed might of the numbers attributed to the Qur'anic letters attained such a dimension in Muslim thinking that in the Indian sub-continent the claimant of the position of the world mujaddid of the second millennium, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi took the help of this science of numbers to establish his claim. Talking about his status in the new millennium he said: <sup>35</sup>مجدد أحمد شد.

### QUR'AN VERSUS THE QUR'ANIC MAGIC

The special merit of the Qur'anic letters and the determination of their numerical value very soon gave birth to a kind of knowledge that ran counter to the Qur'anic concept of *tawheed*. In the Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, God alone is the mover and shaker of this universe. Profit or loss, death or life is His prerogative alone. The Qur'an encourages a direct relationship between God and human beings. It asserts that God is nearer to a human being than even his jugular vein. However, those who explored the secrets of letters in the Qur'an and determined their numerical value certainly acted against the paradigm offered by *tawheed*. They propagated the idea that the words of the Qur'an themselves contained such occult powers that through them it was possible to have power over natural and supernatural forces. In other words, the powers that were exclusive to God were now available in the Book itself, thanks to the opinions and comments of the mystics; or, at least, one can say that the Sacred Book (*kitab-e muqaddas*) became a co-sharer of the powers with God. In the earlier centuries, under the influence of scholasticism the debate that raged about the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an left the impression that the Qur'an was, in effect, an extension of God's being. Such misguided thinking also played its role in spreading the misconception about the secret power of Qur'anic letters.

There was an unshakable belief among Muslims regarding the Qur'an. From the very first day, everyone accepted it to be the Word of God. It was an inheritance that was an object of pride for all Muslims cutting across groups and sects. Taking advantage of this belief rooted firmly in the Muslim mind the Sufis made it the practicing board for all their distorted and polluted experiments. With the help of the prevalent knowledge of the occult and hoary practices of charms a spurious and abstruse stream of knowledge was produced and the entire basis of such knowledge was sought to be validated through the Qur'anic verses where words like *najm* (star), *kawakib* (constellation), *burj* (zodiac) etc occurred. And as the Sufis had already made space for reading their own meanings into the Qur'an, it became possible for them to treat the Qur'an as the work of white magic and look for different kinds of occult powers in different verses. Among the elders of the Israelites it was not a strange idea that the real meaning of Torah was hidden in the numerical value of the Aramaic letters. If God encompassed all knowledge then the reason for it was that He knew how to organize those letters in different permutations and combinations. In the later years the Cabbalistic mysticism had fabricated the belief that God had made the universe with the help of letters. Some said that the numerals from 1 to 10 contained extraordinary occult powers. Their arrangement in different combinations could make

a lot of difference. According to the Cabbalistic understanding of the book of Genesis, letters contain mysterious powers and with their help God created the universe. Whatever is there in the universe has its existence by virtue of the mysterious powers of letters. Letters are not only a means of communication but they hold a key to experiencing the Truth or the spiritual experience of merging with God.<sup>36</sup> Rather than reading the Qur'an as the Book of Guidance, the mystics tried to read it as a text that contained the secrets of subduing the natural and supernatural forces of the universe. Popular tales, legends and unreliable traditions, in all of which the fanciful commentators had a key role to play, had propagated such impressions about some of the surahs of the Qur'an. For example, according to their views, surah Falaq and surah Naas (*muawwizatain*) had been revealed in order to release the Prophet from the spell of magic. In some traditions it was claimed that surah Fatiha could be an antidote to scorpion bites. Some other traditions narrated how the Prophet, before going to bed, read some surahs and blew over himself for the purposes of personal security. Not only that all such stories run counter to the Qur'anic mode of thinking, but they cannot be considered correct in the crucible of historical criticism. But the fanciful commentators, with a penchant for storytelling, among whom Tabari deserves a special mention, had given space to such tales in the footnotes of their commentaries with such frequency and regularity that they had their impact even on Islamic scholars, not to speak of ordinary Muslims, and they took them to be real. An atmosphere prevailed where there was near-consensus among people about the presence of verses in the Qur'an that could act like black magic as a cure for some ailments and for subduing supernatural spirits. Besides this, the belief also gained ground that apart from these verses related to black magic there were other verses in the Qur'an whose occult powers could enable human beings to perform extraordinary feats. The problem was unlike the verses related to black magic, traditions related to the second kind of verses were quite scarce, and it was difficult to take them to the stage of 'fame' where they could attain general acceptability of people. Under the circumstances, the solution struck was to attribute inspiration, minor revelation and mystic experiences to the elders and it was asserted that to these gentlemen were conveyed, either in dream or in the waking state, the hidden powers of these verses. It was also stipulated that the 'ignorant' should not be told about this secret. By 'ignorant' was meant those people who were not ready to accept these fanciful fabrications without testing them in the crucible of the Qur'anic paradigm of thought.

As the inspiration and minor revelations claimed to have been received by those who did mystic exercises without being ranked as the *salihin*, i.e. to say, the sincere

men of Islam, gained respectability, people began to read the Qur'an as a text book for making amulets and charms. The supposed numerical values of letters and their supposed occult powers also led to the distortion of the lexical structure of the Qur'an. This is because for those given to read the Qur'an as a book of magic, the original lexical and linguistic structure of the Qur'an was meaningless.<sup>37</sup> The numerical value of verses were determined and a tradition began whereby the surahs were written in a kind of mystical chart. The long ones consisting of hundreds of verses were compressed into the small box of the chart. Further, the belief was propagated that it was enough to look at these charts mornings and evenings, to hang them from the walls, to paste them at places where they catch sunlight mornings and evenings, to tie them around arms and to wear them around the neck like amulets. The words of the Almighty Allah were turned into a joke by these people. For example, the descriptions in surah Maryam that always revitalized and rejuvenated the hearts of believers, and that contained enough materials for the guidance and inspiration of believers were now compressed into a small box of six lines, thanks to the intervention of the mystics. And this belief was invented that if this was hung in a desolate field then it would turn into a lush green meadow on the strength of the occult power of the chart.<sup>38</sup>

These people who reduced the Qur'an into a game of numbers also tried to convince people that the occult powers of the Qur'an that they had explored could not be called a human invention, nor should they be regarded as black magic or charm, because they belonged not to the world of evil spirits but to the world of sublime spirituality. This division of the world was a figment of their imagination on the basis of which they designated the extraordinary feats of sufis as miracles and the feats of non-Muslim *sanniyasis* and yogis as a step forward to spirituality. Although there was no essential difference in the nature of the happenings, one set was described as belonging to the world of evil spirits while the other set was described as belonging to the spiritual realm. From this the impression was strengthened that the Qur'an is a treasure house of secret and occult powers. This is an extraordinary text of white magic that Allah has bestowed on the believers to have control over the elements of the universe, and only the mystics have the knowledge of these secrets. The chart-makers endeavored to find the basis of their purely whimsical knowledge in some of the verses of the Qur'an. For example, it was said that Allah introduces/ praises Himself through the means of numbers (وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ); and at some places he praises Himself through the means of letters, as it is evidenced in the letters of surah Iqra.' From this the argument was put forward – as asserted by Al-Buni – that the status of the letter was determined by its numerical value, and it is through the numbers that the secret of the

divine intelligence could be gauged.<sup>39</sup> In this way, firstly, the secret potentials of the verses were located in letters, and then the numerical values of the letters were determined. And then the numerical values of the letters were changed. For example, it was claimed that the secrets of the occult powers of letters that occur in the beginning of the first twenty-eight surahs of the Qur'an had great potentials and their chart was especially efficacious for many problems that plagued humanity. Similarly, the impression was given out that the essence of these surahs of the Qur'an and their occult powers were somehow compressed into one small box. The impression remained there that the box where, ostensibly, an array of unconnected letters could be seen, were connected at a deeper and subtle level to the Qur'an even though it might not be immediately apparent. Then these charts containing letters were transformed into numbers by saying that to Allah, numbers had precedence over letters. Thus, the first twenty-eight surahs of the Qur'an were distorted and compressed into a small box, which was purely a whimsical creation of those *aamelin* who ventured into uncalled for mystic exercises. For the advocates of the occult powers of the Qur'an there was nothing left in those surahs. When all the requirements of daily life could be taken care of by a small chart, then why should people care to read the surahs and reflect on them? One result of such a misguided notion gaining ground about the Qur'an was that not only the original objective of the Book, i.e., providing guidance to humanity was suspended, but also the status of its text as eternal and immutable could not remain intact. When one comes to think of it, the prevalence of charts and boxes gave currency to the kinds of customs and practices for whose removal the Qur'an, in fact, was revealed.<sup>40</sup>

These occult charts and the practice of white magic involved the ummah in a kind of polytheism the basis of which was sought to be found in the Qur'an. Now, rather than seeking help from Allah the Almighty it was considered preferable to seek assistance from Beautiful Names. The belief was propagated that simply the repetition of the Beautiful Names was enough to achieve certain objectives: *وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا*. Now, prayers were not offered to the Almighty through His Attributes but it was as though the Attributes themselves were considered to have been empowered to offer help by themselves, and that Allah Himself ruled the elements through these Attributes. Some went so far as to assert that the very Godhood of God consisted in the Greatest Name (اسم أعظم), and this was the door that was closed to human beings, and that whoever God blessed or wished to make a sharer of the secret powers with Him, He offered him the knowledge of the Great Names. We will deal with this matter in greater detail later; suffice it to say here that this is an indication of how those who

regarded the Qur'an as the key to secret powers came to regard the Qur'anic descriptions as the substitute for God Himself and began to pray and pay obeisance to these Qur'anic verses or descriptions and their supposed occult powers. The mystics devised such prayers in which, rather than God, the Attributes of God were placed in His place. Their supplications ran as follows: اللهم إني أسئلك باسمك الذي فتحت به عالم الخلق<sup>41</sup> or as follows: اللهم إني أسئلك بأسمائك كلها الحميدة التي إذا وضعت على شيء ذل وخضع وإذا طلبت<sup>42</sup> بهن السيئات حرقت. The situation was so bad that in the prayers of those who did mystic exercises without being ranked as the 'Sincere Men of Islam' one could even hear the following: اللهم إني أسئلك بحق بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. Behind all such prayers the belief that was active was that God's Names or the phrase *bismillah* were repositories of great powers by virtue of their numerical strength, because of which supplications were liable to be extraordinarily efficacious. Books of charts and amulets categorically asserted and claimed authoritatively that if certain verses or prayers were conducted through specified methods and at specified times with the accompaniment of wails and cries – some of these methods or conditions certainly pertained to the practice of black magic – then these prayers were bound to yield results. The belief that was active behind all these claims was that God who acted through the means of the numerical strength of letters could not but accept these prayers that were embellished with the weaponry of numbers. In their essential nature, these prayers, rather than indicating surrender and supplication on the part of human beings, declared the occult powers of the person offering the prayer. The belief in the secret powers of charts and numbers polluted even the prayers to God. The concept of Qur'anic *tawheed* got buried under the weight of these fabricated Qur'anic charts and occult practices.

As we have already pointed out, those who chose to understand the Qur'an at the low level of charts and occult readings also raised a question mark on Allah's Almighty status by suggesting that His authority was dependent upon the Beautiful Names and the might of numbers. Then the question gained salience among the mystics as to what was the secret of Allah's authority. Some people even said that among the 'special attributes of Godhead' were the knowledge of Beautiful Names and Godly attributes, among which was the knowledge of the 'Greatest Name' (اسم أعظم) that Allah had kept exclusively for Himself.<sup>43</sup> The quest for this supposed *ism-e a'zam* continued both inside and outside the Qur'an. Many divine prayers, attributed to the elders, were brought to the fore and it was asserted that they contained اسم أعظم within them.<sup>44</sup> It was also declared that there was as much difference between اسم أعظم and *bismillah* as between the white and black of the eye.<sup>45</sup> As the matter pertained to the arrangement



of letters and their numerical values, by the notion that اسم أعظم was hidden in some prayer or in some Qur'anic verse it was generally understood that اسم أعظم had affinity with them in their arrangement of letters. However, a level of secrecy and ambiguity has always been maintained about what it (i.e., اسم أعظم) really is. Some said that اسم أعظم was there in the two verses of surah Baqarah. Some others tried to locate it in one verse of surah Aal-e Imran, three verses of surah In'aam, two verses of surah A'raf, two verses of surah Anfal four verses of surah Maryam and surah Ta-ha and many other verses of many other surahs. Some said that the Qur'anic verses that had the expression لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ are all اسم أعظم.<sup>46</sup> Some tried to resolve this disagreement on the issue by saying that everyone had a different *ism-e a'zm*, as there were different kinds of supplications in the prayers of prophets.<sup>47</sup> Some characterized اسم أعظم as the prayer of Yunus while others said that it should be searched in surahs Baqarah, Aal-e Imran and Ta-ha, as is narrated by Abu Imama in *Ibn Maja*. Someone said that اسم أعظم is hidden in the phrase – الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ – that occurs in the above three surahs. This view has also been attributed to persons like Ibn Qaiyim and Imam Ghazali. It was also claimed that Imam Ghazali used to advise people to mutter the phrase a thousand times everyday. Some Islamic scholars issued various statements about identifying اسم أعظم. For example, Tabari said in *Majmua Al-Bayan* that both the phrases – حي وقيوم – and اسم أعظم – ذوالجلال والإكرام – are اسم أعظم. A tradition attributed to Jafar Al-Sadiq stated that *ism-e a'zm* really meant – *rabbana*. Such divergent views could not arrive at any resolution of the real identity of اسم أعظم; however, in this context no less than forty statements were successful in maintaining the ambiguity about it and sustaining the notion that اسم أعظم was such a deep secret that its knowledge could take the devotee in an instant to the pinnacle of spiritual glory as a result of which he would gain absolute control and domination over the elements of the universe.<sup>48</sup> The riddle of اسم أعظم eventually remained unresolved. But as the notion gained currency and its bases were sought to be traced in the Qur'an, it led to disastrous consequences as far as the Qur'anic paradigm of *tawheed* was concerned because, according to the mystics, now the absolute authority of God was said to depend on these occult powers over which the mystics had gained considerable access.

The machinations of the mystics yielded the desired results. Slowly, the mystic charts and occult knowledge had such an impact on the people's minds that even the opponents of mysticism fell victims to delusions about the original text of Guidance. So much so that even a mature thinker like Ibn Qaiyim became an advocate of magic. In *Zaad Al-Ma'ad* he expressed the view that the Prophet used to treat all kinds of ailments through the application of 'permissible' magic as told him by God. And that a

person who muttered – *سَلَامٌ عَلَى نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ* – in the evening would remain immune from scorpion bites. This belief on the secret powers of the Qur'anic words was, in fact, an extension of the belief in the powers of the word *kun* ('be') about which the mystics believed that the whole universe was the handiwork of two letters, namely *kaaf* and *noon*, and that imposed limitations on God's absolute might through letters and numbers. Ibn Taimiyah, known as the icon of non-conformist and rebellious ideas in Muslim thinking and who is regarded as a symbol of mature thinking, also could not escape the influence of the mystics. He designated the special thinking of the mystics as indicating their spiritual status.<sup>49</sup> In the books of mystical charts one finds means and methods of how to control an object or an enemy, how to subdue evil or benign spirits and how to use them for personal ends. A scholar like Ibn Taimiyah saw in these extraordinary feats the strength of the mystics' piety. As for the scholars among mainstream Muslims, they always showed an attitude of reverence and respect towards the mystics. In the words of Ashraf Ali Thanavi: 'The act of exercising charm amounts to disbelief if the words used therein do not pertain to the canon of Islam; on the contrary, they have been extracted from the sources prohibited in Islam, for example, taking the name of devils with the purpose of seeking their help. The act of exercising charms amounts to transgression and sinfulness if the words therein are from the canon of Islam provided that they are used to harm someone or to serve an unlawful purpose beyond the limits prescribed by Islam. If this act does not intend to harm anyone nor is it used to serve a forbidden purpose it cannot be considered an act of charm but will be termed as making amulets and tying knots, and it is permissible even though undesirable' (*mubah*).<sup>50</sup> Another revered scholar of traditional Islam and mature intellect in the Indian sub-continent, Manazir Ahsan Gilani opines that the use of the Qur'anic verses for subduing jinns or spirits is a legitimate task. Among the traditional Muslim scholars such verses are called *qawari' al-Qur'an* about which the belief ran that the mystics have recorded their special powers after their own personal experiences. For example, it is claimed about the verse – *أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ*, that if it is read on a mountain then it would give way or recede under one's feet.<sup>51</sup> The attitude of reverence and extraordinary respect towards the verses specified by the mystics resulted in the creation of an atmosphere in which, even today, people generally refer to the Qur'an as the treasure house of secret powers that effectively lowered the status of the Qur'an as the ultimate Book of Guidance, and made it a book of mantras or incantations. When reputed scholars and mature intellects of Islam begin to advocate the supposed secret powers of the Qur'an and when they think it proper to embellish their commentaries with copious reproduction of mystical charts,<sup>52</sup> then how can we

expect that an ordinary reader should read the Qur'an as the eternal and immutable word of Allah rather than a book of amulets and charms, and that he should seek guidance from it rather than using it for gaining narrow, selfish and lowly gains?

Slowly, the supposed power of specified verses of the Qur'an introduced a new element of Jewish thinking in the Muslim thought that is known as 'Qur'anic practices' (*a'maal-e Qur'ani*). This non-Qur'anic use of the Qur'an not only suspended the Qur'anic message but also changed the very meaning of the word 'practice' (*amal*) in common perception. Now, by 'practitioner' (*amil*) was meant one who had the knowledge of the secret mystic charts and who, through the Qur'anic magic, could control evil spirits and others and had power over them. This notion of the Qur'anic practices slowly became a part of the prevalent Muslim thought. The Muslim scholars put their seal of approval to it by saying that there was no harm in taking help from the Qur'anic verses to control evil spirits or to exorcise people from the effect of spirits. Ibn Taimiyah has written that the Satan runs away from the house in which surah Baqarah is read. As for the terminal verse of surah Baqarah and *ayat-al Kursi*, Ibn Taimiyah opined that their status was that of *qawari' al-Qur'an* which could be used to drive away Satans and jinns.<sup>53</sup> Once people started believing in the secret powers of the Qur'anic verses, there was a deluge of Hadiths in which statements supporting such views were attributed to the Prophet, that if a person read *ayat al-Kursi* at the time of going to bed then an angel was appointed by Allah to protect him and his property remained safe from thieves;<sup>54</sup> or that if a person always read *alam nashrah* at the time of combing the hair, then he remained content in his livelihood.<sup>55</sup> The traditionists adopted a soft attitude towards the 'efficacious' Hadiths, rather some of them propagated these with utmost sincerity and honesty so that the common Muslims could be drawn towards religious practices. Thus, many Prophetic reports related to the notion of the supposedly efficacious and power-packed Qur'anic verses became a part of our authentic intellectual heritage. On top of it, the mystics compiled collections of such efficacious verses, where diverse, strange and bizarre merits were attributed to specified verses. For example, Dairbi prescribed the following as a remedy for the ailment of phlegm: the patient should take seven small pebbles of salt and then read *ayat Al-Kursi* on each of them seven times. If he took them early in the morning for seven days then his ailment could be cured.<sup>56</sup>

The Qur'an has been declared to be a cure (*shifa*) and a blessing for the believers. The mystics who were, by and large, not content with the surface meaning, took the word *shifa* in its surface meaning. Once it became the vogue to read the Qur'an for ulterior gains, people were provided with justification to read it as the cure for spiritual



verses, each one of which contained ten *qaaf*, and that reading all the fifty *qaaf* would accrue all kinds of benefits to the reader. The following hadith was attributed to Ayisha: من كتب هذه الآيات الخمس التي فيها خمسون قافا يوم الجمعة فشربها أدخل في جوفه ألف شفاء ودواء i.e., 'وألف صحة وألف رحمة وألف رافة وألف يقين وألف قوة ومائة ألف نور ونزع منه كل داء وغل والحزن والغم' i.e., the person who would write these five verses containing fifty *qaaf* and dip them in water and will drink that water, his stomach will be blessed with all kinds of cure, benedictions, illuminations of heart, peace of mind etc. etc. Further all kinds of diseases, evil thoughts, depression and sadness will be taken out of his system. It was also claimed that Salman the Persian used to read these verses, as instructed by the Prophet.<sup>58</sup>

The advocates of spiritual healing also brought changes in the way the Qur'an should be recited. For instance, Sheikh Abul Abbas Al-Buni, with reference to some mystics, prescribed a special method of reciting surah *Yasin* for getting the surah yield the desired results. According to this method, the reader should repeat the word 'Yasin' sixty times and then proceed further. Then he should go up to – فَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ – and pause for a while to mutter the prayer prescribed by him. Thus, after reading every couple of verses, special prayers were prescribed that should be interspersed while reading the surah.<sup>59</sup>

Fariduddin Attar has prescribed the following method to get relief from pain in the eye: one should read the verse – فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِظَاءَكَ – seven times and then read *durood* and blow over the nail of both the thumbs and then rub his or her eyes. It was claimed that if one did so, not only that the pain would vanish from the eye, but it would improve eyesight as well. Shah Waliullah has also mentioned this in *al-Qawl al-Jameel*. Some also said that if the devotee placed his hands over his eyes and read – فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا – it would provide relief from pain. Nizamuddin Awliya not only searched verses from the Qur'an having secret powers to improve eyesight, but also prescribed a self-invented method about how to use them. He said that one should utter the ten letters from the expressions *kaf, ha, a'in, swad; hha, meem; a'in, seen, qaf* and while uttering each letter he should close one finger. Having uttered all the letters and closed all the fingers simultaneously, he should run his hands over his eyes, which would bring about a holistic cure for him. The custom that one finds in the Indian sub-continent, i.e., the custom of reading the verse – اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ – and blowing it over one's thumb and then rubbing one's eyes was, in fact, prescribed by none other than Nizamuddin Auliya.<sup>60</sup>

The advocates of spiritual healing did not remain content merely by exploring the secret and occult potentials of the Qur'anic verses, but instituted changes in the

method of its recitations for the purposes of cure. For example, according to many mystics, for getting relief for many ailments the recitation of surah Fatiha along with *bismillah* was necessary. In other words, *bismillahir rahman al-raheem* should be read along with the 'al' of 'al-hamd', which should be stressed while pronouncing it. If one read in this manner, it was assumed that it would provide cure for any kind of ailment.<sup>61</sup> For the fulfillment of one's objective through the recitation of surah Fatiha Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi had imposed the condition that the devotee, after performing the *maghrib* prayer (both the obligatory and supererogatory parts of it) should read surah Fatiha forty times sitting in the same spot, and then he should pray to Allah through the exalted status of the surah.<sup>62</sup> The author of *Fatahul Majeed* stated it, through references to some mystics, that if there was pain in any part of the body, then one should place one's hand on the spot and read surah Fatiha seven times and then pray to God, which will result in the amelioration of the pain.<sup>63</sup>

In treating the Qur'an as the book of white magic the mystics did not maintain the august dignity of this Book. To derive benefits from surah Fatiha, in any ailment blowing on the spot after reading it or keeping the chart of its numbers with one might have fulfilled the need of the common people. As for those who wanted to scale new heights in their spiritual journey, or who wanted to unravel mysteries through Qur'anic verses, zeroed in on the surah Fatiha that contained the kernel of the Qur'an. Thus, they not only changed the method of its recitation, invented prayers to enhance its spiritual potentials, but also added suitable and alliterative words and sentences that, to a great extent, became a parody of the Word of God. For example, the long surah Fatiha that Al-Buni compiled had, after the verse – *الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ* – the following alliterative verses: *منور بصائر العارفين بأنوار المعرفة واليقين وجاذب سائر المحققين بجذبات القرب والتمكين وفاتح أفعال قلوب الموحدين بمفاتيح التوحيد وجاذبها بجذبات القرب والفتح المبين الذي أحسن كل خلقه وبدأ خلق حمدا يفوق حمد الحامدين حمدا يكون رضاءً ومرضياً – الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ – عند رب العالمين* in surah Fatiha, and gave the surah a new form after his own additions. Ibn Arabi also claimed that the person who would read the surah compiled by him seven times everyday would gain access to hidden knowledge, he would be aware of the realms of angels and God – the *Jabrut*, and all his worldly and other-worldly wishes would be fulfilled.<sup>65</sup> And for those who wanted to win over angels and people's hearts, for their recitation, seven verses were specified to be recited on seven specified days, and they were asked to recite the surah in seven parts. It was claimed that this particular arrangement held a great secret.<sup>66</sup> The references that one finds in the annals of mystics related to their crossing the seas, walking on the surface of water and

performing extraordinary feats merely on the secret potential of surah Fatiha are legion. The fact that the common readers of the surah could not perform the same feats was sought to be explained away by pointing out that because the mystics had the knowledge of the secret meanings of the verses, it was not difficult for them to exhibit such extraordinary feats. The incident of Khwaja Usman Haruni's crossing the river has been described in *Dalil Al-Aarifeen* in the following way: he read the surah Fatiha five times, placed his feet on the water and crossed the river.<sup>67</sup> The skeptics who expressed doubts in such stories were sought to be silenced by pointing to the supposed mysterious meanings of the surahs.

The search for the special powers of the Qur'an led even the firm believers and genuine scholars of Islam to those realms for which there was no justification either in the Qur'an or in the practices of the Muslims during the first century of Islam. Specified prayers were devised to vanquish supernatural powers. Trivial, meaningless words and charts were pressed into service and it was given out that their use would enable people to gain extraordinary spiritual powers or they would be able to safeguard themselves from imminent dangers. These were the false beliefs and superstitions for the removal of which the Qur'an was revealed. Ignorance crept into Muslim thinking once again through the media of charts and amulets. As all this was done through references to the Qur'an, people found it difficult to dismiss such mumbo-jumbo out of hand. Even reputed scholars could not muster up enough courage to make a rational and critical assessment of such misguided practices. This is the reason why despite the distortion and misrepresentation of the Qur'anic text and its objectives by the mystics and the harm caused to Islamic belief, some Islamic scholars did adopt a cautious attitude towards them, but they could not take any drastic measures against them. Particularly when the mystical philosophy of life could manage to find an advocate like Ghazali, in the following centuries even the stalwarts in Islamic thought did not dare to take issue with it. We will deal with it in greater detail later.

The kind of daring and foolhardiness shown by the mystics could be gauged from the occult practices that were the usual norms among the mystics and their followers. For example, the following method was suggested for one wanted to have someone infatuated with him or even fall in love: one should write the surah *Yasin* along with the names of the lover and the beloved on the left arm of a goat. This act of exercising charm should be undertaken on a Friday and the one who writes it must be in a state of total nakedness. The arm has to be put into a vessel and buried under the hearth. It was claimed that this ritual would make the heart of the desired person bleed for the one performing the ritual.<sup>68</sup> With reference to the Gangohi family, a chart containing

the names of the 'dwellers of the cave' (mystics) consists of meaningless letters as follows: إلهي بحرمة يملبخا، مكسلمينا، كشفوطط، كشافطيونس، تبونس، اذر فطيرني، يوانس بولس، وكلبهم. <sup>69</sup> this chart has become famous through the books of occult practices. Similarly, in the Indian sub-continent – بسم الله عليقا، مليقا، is also known as an efficacious and acclaimed mystical chart. Some people were also in favor of writing – عليقا، مليقا، ما في قلوبهم سليقا أنت تعلمون on the green leaves of trees. <sup>70</sup> Such prayers were also devised where there was simply repetition of meaningless words and names, for example, طاطائيل، مهطائيل، مهلائيل أو ثمتائيل and many such names were devised that rhymed with Jibrail, Israfil, and Mikail that created the effect of parody. Charts of wailing and praying were made in references to them, so much so that such fabricated letters could be seen in charts about which it was said that some of them were from the Torah and others were from the Gospels. <sup>71</sup>

The practices that began as a result of unraveling the secrets of the Qur'an with references to many other heavenly books, apart from the Qur'an, paved the way for the reprehensible and non-conformist intellects to seek refuge in the Qur'an. Supposed Qur'anic practices that were, in reality, outside the Qur'an were sought to be validated through the means of supposed revelatory and inspirational words and sentences for the general ummah that had hardly any truck with even common sense, not to speak of the Faith! It was claimed that if a person read the word *badooh* seven times and blew over water then the person drinking that water would get infatuated with him. <sup>72</sup> No one felt it necessary to ask what was the difference between these nonsensical abracadabra and black magic? The fact is when human beings imposed their own physical desires and longings on the objectives of the Qur'an they began to treat it as a kind of formula for gaining worldly ends and when our learned scholars of Islam began to consider it proper to use it for such purposes as winning the hearts and minds of people, finding some treasure trove of wealth, having a male child or increasing one's sexual potency. <sup>73</sup> When such superstitions that if one cut a musk melon after reading the expression فَذَبَّحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ it would add to the taste and sweetness of the fruit becomes a part of the Faith through references to the Qur'an, <sup>74</sup> or that at the time of intercourse if one uttered *al-Moghni*, one could provide greater satisfaction to one's wife, <sup>75</sup> or that if one read – وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ – one could stay secure from any assault by dogs or tigers <sup>76</sup> or that if one made an amulet with the sentence – وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ – وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ and tied it to the thigh of a woman it would provide her relief from labor pain, <sup>77</sup> and the most interesting of all, that if one read – اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ –



hair would get automatically parted straight across one's head<sup>78</sup> – then why should one care at all the alien sources in this spiritual transactions of mystic charts?

The extraordinary boldness and daring shown by the mystics regarding the Qur'an distracted the common people from the real objective of the Qur'an to such an extent that even those who kept up the tradition of direct access to the Qur'an in the dominant atmosphere of taking recourse to mystic charts and charms, had their hearts and minds dominated by the utilitarian aspect of the Qur'an as interpreted by the Sufis. A major segment of the believers who shied away from the Qur'anic charts and occult practices and who, under all circumstances, insisted on the primacy of the Divine Word, had also many among them who, instead of reading it in the light of its primary objective, were in favor of reading it as a book of merits and benedictions. The righteous among the ummah and those who had internalized the Faith in its true sense still regarded it as the central and seminal document that governed their lives, but they also began to entertain the idea that its frequent reading and recitation could result in gaining maximum merit and achieving salvation. In other words, the Qur'an was treated as a mechanical device to gain merits; and each verse of it accrued for the reader merits, some verses more and some less, and if some specified verses were recited frequently then the believers could gain excessive merits. Some of the mystics, in all sincerity, searched out such traditions in respect of the Qur'an whose objective was to draw people to the real objective of the Qur'an in an atmosphere where the Muslim society was straying away from the Qur'anic paradigm of thought and becoming a prisoner of non-Qur'anic ideas and idle fancies. In the context of benedictions and beneficial effects of verses, these traditions, in later years, became the cause of distancing people from the real function of the Qur'an and its original objectives. The impact of this notion of the special potential of letters can be seen prominently in the tradition recorded in *Tirmizi* where it has been asserted that if a person read one letter of Allah's Book, he would gain one merit and the profit earned by one merit would be equal to that of ten merits. It has been further clarified in the same tradition that *alif, laam, meem* does not constitute one letter but that these three should be taken separately.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in the tradition in *Bihaiqi*, the letters in *bismillah* have been treated separately as *ba, seen, meem* etc. These traditions could not make people access the Qur'an more frequently than they did, but now, while reciting the Qur'an, they concentrated on the gainful aspects of this activity. For the readers, the Qur'an now constituted a text in which reading and reciting of each and every letter provided them scope for earning more and more merits. This mode of thinking about the Qur'an gave birth to a mindset that looked at this sacred activity in

terms of gain and loss, as in business transactions. Then those surahs were marked out that were purported to have greater beneficial effects in comparison with other surahs, and whose repeated readings and recitation were supposed to earn greater amount of merits by investing smaller amount of time and energy. Thus, it was declared that surah Ikhlas was equal (in merit) to one third of the Qur'an, and so, if one read it thrice it would be considered he had completed reading the entire Qur'an.<sup>80</sup> It was also asserted that in terms of merit, surah Fatiha was equal to two thirds of the Qur'an.<sup>81</sup> Another tradition, attributed to Hasan Basari, claimed that if a person read surah Fatiha it was as though he had read the Torah, the Old Testament, the Bible and the Qur'an.<sup>82</sup> The result of treating the Qur'an as a machine to earn merits was that it gave rise to scores of such fabricated traditions. It was claimed that a person who read surah Yasin earned merits equal to reciting the Qur'an ten times over.<sup>83</sup> And that a person who read it merely to seek the pleasure of Allah then all his past sins were expiated; and that the person who read surah Yasin every night and then died, would achieve martyrdom. Such traditions were fabricated highlighting the special merits of the surah that, not just the living, but even the dead had the possibility of benefitting. It was claimed that the reader of surah Yasin was forgiven by Allah. For the hungry, there was material in it for the alleviation of hunger; lost animals could be found through its merits; lost wayfarers could find the way through its merit, and death throes were alleviated and labor pain was reduced by its recitation. Some Muslim scholars raised doubts about such claims but the impression left in the popular mind regarding earning merits and fulfilling one's desires and longings through the efforts of mystics could not be wiped out. Even today, in most households rewards are supplicated and death throes sought to be alleviated through the recitation of surah Yasin. About some verses it was claimed that they were so powerful that they interceded even in the grave on behalf of their readers and address Allah as follows: 'If I exist in Your Book, then accept my intercession, or wipe me out from Your Book.'<sup>84</sup> The two such powerful surahs in the Qur'an were said to be Tabarakallazi and Ha-Meem Al-Sajda, and it was asserted that whoever read these two surahs it was as though the person stayed awake in the 'Night of Destiny' (ليلة القدر).<sup>85</sup> Some people also claimed that the person who read surah Hadeed, surah Waqeah and surah Rahman would be counted among those destined for the prized paradise (جنة الفردوس). These were the benefits accruing to the reader of the Qur'an who, even if actuated by the desire to earn merits, kept up their relationship with the Qur'an at some level. In their embellished accounts of the benefits of Qur'anic verses, our mystics did not even respect the fundamental Qur'anic view according to which every person is responsible

for his own actions. It was claimed that those who memorised the Qur'an and acted according to Qur'anic principles would also be given the opportunity to take ten members of their families to heaven who, otherwise, were destined to be consigned to hell.<sup>86</sup>

As the real objective of the Qur'an was, in effect, suspended by people who used it as the key to gain merits, the result was, despite the outward respect shown to the Qur'an, the door to accessing it directly by the ummah remained closed. All the attention of the people was concentrated on excessive recitation of the Text and to earn more and more merits through it. This situation gave rise to mystics like Baba Nau Lakh Hazari (St. Nine Hundred and One Thousand) whose holiness consisted in the fact that he had completed reading the Qur'an nine hundred and one thousand times during his life.<sup>87</sup> In the context of the Qur'an, the objective of providing guidance to humanity was supplanted by the objective of earning merits and it made a permanent place in Muslim thinking. Through excessive recitations the believers not only engaged themselves in earning more and more merits, but they began to send rewards to the dead as well. It was, in fact, the mystics who opened the door for establishing rapport with the dead. It was purely a product of their fanciful imagination. When it became possible to send merits or rewards to the dead, this concept was taken still further to pave the way for the ritualistic recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'an, *Al-Fatiha*. Rich and sumptuous dishes were sent to the dead souls in the form of *fatiha*. Rather, a venerable mystic is on record to have left behind a will stipulating that delicious chicken curry and *biryani* should be sent on the occasion of his *fatiha*.<sup>88</sup> No one cared to ask if merits can be sent to the dead, why not curses or torments as well? And that, was it possible that like sending rewards and merits one could send the gift of one's sins to one's enemies!

The people who wanted to earn maximum merit in minimum time through the reading and recitation of the Qur'an did not quench their thirst by the mere recitation of the Qur'an. Different schools of mystics devised series of prayers and incantations and compiled them in the form of books. The aspirants of merits devised such revelatory and inspirational prayers whose spiritual merits were said to be greater than even the Qur'an. Rather, some prayers were devised to augment the efficacy of some particular surahs. Some prayers were said to have been revealed to some mystics in their individual capacities. For example, this notion was propagated about *Duae Ganjul-Arsh* that this prayer was seen by a mystic written on *arsh*, i.e., the Empyrean Seat. Some traditions attributed it to Gabriel. There is no human longing, permissible or impermissible, about which it was not claimed that this prayer is efficacious. Similar

merits were also attributed to *Duae Qadah Muazzam*, reading of which was claimed to be a guarantee for earning unlimited merits and even becoming a seer (*wali*).<sup>89</sup> Whether it was *Duae Siryani* or *Darood Taj*, *Darood Tunajjina* or *Darood Mahi*, *Darood Muqaddas* or *Darood Lakhkhi*, *Darood Akbar* or *Wazifa Haft Haykal* – their merits were extolled in such superlative terms, and such guarantees were given for the fulfillment of all worldly needs and wishes through them that the merits of the Qur'an were left much behind. The act of earning merits and achieving salvation through recitation of the Qur'an began to seem to be a long-drawn affair (*amr-e taweeel*). In such circumstances, for hoarding the wealth of this world and the Hereafter, such collections of prayers and incantations were compiled that were purely a product of human mind and imagination, and had no relationship with the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the believers labored under the delusion that the frequent reading and recitation of the collections of such prayers containing Qur'anic verses, as for instance, *Hazb Al-Bahr*, *Hizb Al-A'zam*, *Jami' Al-Salah*, *Haft Haykal*, *Mafatih Al-Jinan* and *Hisne Haseen* which, in practical terms, had supplanted Allah's Book, could help them build their lives in this world and the world hereafter on a firm footing. There was no dearth of such incidents in the books compiled by the mystics where it was said that a person who had been stealing shrouds for forty years deserved heaven simply for the reason that he remained engaged in reading such collections of prayers from the prayer at dawn to the time of *ishraq* (early morning supererogatory prayer).<sup>90</sup> In the description of the mystics, *Darood-e Mahi* even surpassed the merits of the Qur'an! It was claimed that a fish had read this *darood* just once and on the strength of its merit Allah declared fire *haram* on it, i.e., Allah forbade fire to have any effect on it.<sup>91</sup> When the prayers and incantations compiled by the mystics contained such stupendous merits why should anyone feel the need to approach the Qur'an for his spiritual improvement or for any other purpose?

### QUR'ANIC THOUGHT VERSUS THE MYSTIC ABERRATIONS

First of all, let us look at the concept of *tawheed* (monotheism). According to the mystics, the concept of Allah's Unity is something that cannot be expressed in words. There is no such power in human language or description to convey it adequately in all its dimensions. On the face of it, this idea seems to indicate a certain philosophical depth. There is no doubt about the fact that on a philosophical plane, the conceiving of *tawheed* should be beyond human language, power of description and comprehension. However, for the believers, the concept of *tawheed* that is desirable is the one that can enter their cognitive universe, and taking into account the limitations of human

understanding and apprehension, Allah informed human beings as much as they should know through Revelation. This concept of *tawheed* did not require to be defined by anyone else, as Allah Himself has described it as follows: *شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ*. Spirituality was not enough to satisfy the curiosity of the mystics. The beginning of the mystics' deviation from Muslim thought, the basis of which can be traced in *Risala Qushairiya* and *Kitab Al-Lam'a'*, started from the point when it had begun to be investigated as to how *tawheed* which is beyond the ken of ordinary believers can be understood by people possessing special capabilities. The search for *tawheed* through the vision of Allah (*mushahida-e haqq*) led the mystics to the concept of the 'Unity of Being' (*wahdatul wajood*). They were thirsting for something for which Qur'anic descriptions seemed inadequate to them. One reason for this misconception of the early mystics was the philosophical debates that had left their deep impact on the hearts and minds of the people of the time. As the Greek philosophy and the scholastic debates had left their impact on the methodology of jurisprudence, similarly the mystics also could not remain immune to scholastic hair-splitting. This is the reason why among the early mystics one finds the shadow of these debates vitiating their search for deeper meaning in religion. When someone asked Shibli to define *tawheed* according to his understanding, he replied that it was not possible to describe it in words, and that a person who attempted to do so was an apostate, and the one indicating to it was a believer in two Gods, and one who remained silent was ignorant and one who felt that he had had a vision of God had, in fact, achieved nothing, and that one who indicated to it was an idolater, and that one who discussed about it was indifferent, and that one who felt that he was closer to it was, in fact, far away from it, and that one who considered that he had obtained it had, in fact, lost it.<sup>92</sup> In other words, on principle, it was not possible, according to Shibli, for human beings to conceptualize *tawheed*, because whatever he might imagine to be *tawheed* would, in fact, be the product of his own imagination.

All these philosophical debates raised a more serious question before those who had a predilection for asking questions. And in this way, the philosophical method of interpretation that was undertaken in quest of mysticism jolted the minds of the people. But this was considered to be the flights of the mystics in the higher realms of spirituality, and it so seemed that the cerebral way of interpretation undertaken by the jurists that had left people cold was somehow compensated for by the more liberal and sagacious interpretations of mysticism. Someone gave the definition of mysticism a new twist. His view was that the created world has nothing to do with Allah's *tawheed*, and that apart from Allah, it is beyond anyone's power to describe or

define His Unity. Thus, the pure *tawheed* (*tawheed khalis*) is exclusively for Allah and the creation owes its existence to Him.<sup>93</sup> Shibli said that the person who tried to conceptualize *tawheed* in his mind and related the attributes to Allah, does not have the faintest apprehension of *tawheed*.<sup>94</sup>

The above statements by the mystics about *tawheed* were based not on the Qur'anic insights but were a product of the philosophical debates of the time. The problem was that the mystics declared their own formulations to be the exalted form of their knowledge of *tawheed* (*ma'rifat-e tawheed*). The concept of *tawheed* as understood by the conventional ulema had, to the mystics, represented an inferior understanding of the concept, about which they felt that it was not above board. As for the understanding of *tawheed* by the mystics, the renowned mystics of a later period even claimed that their particular concept of *tawheed* was not based simply on intellect and understanding, but also was confirmed through the devotee's direct communion. Some mystics issued the good tidings that if the devotee undertook some particular kind of spiritual observances and exercises it would result in the illumination of Allah's attributes in his heart, after which the visible world would cease to exist for him and only the real existence would remain.<sup>95</sup> Ghazali has referred, with reference to Sadiqain, such a state of mind in *fana fil-tawheed* in which the devotee sees just One, and so, cannot see even himself.<sup>96</sup> But the matter does not end there. Some mystics spoke about such a state of mind where the devotee dissolves his own identity and attributes and remains alive only in the attributes of the True One, then he dissolves even this identity and sights or apprehends Allah. Then he no longer remains capable to see his dissolution because he has already been merged with the existence of Allah. In the words of Qushairi, فالأول فناء عن نفسه وصفاته ببقائه بصفات الحق، ثم فناءه عن صفات الحق لشهوده الحق ثم فناءه عن شهود فناءه عن شهود فناءه باستهلاكه في وجود الحق.<sup>97</sup> This is the highest point of mysticism about which the mystics felt that the extent of one's dissolution (in Allah) indicated his spiritual attainment. To reach this imaginary height of *tawheed*, the mystics took recourse to a host of spiritual exercises, which, in their view, would help them achieve such a state. This is the highest point of dissolution where some mystics claimed that the Unity of Being (*wahdatul wajood*) was being revealed to them. This is an idea that had totally transformed the Qur'anic view of life.

The quest for a deeper meaning of *tawheed* made the mystics prisoners of those scholastic debates that, in the end, overshadowed Allah the almighty in the complex debates about the Unity of Being. For example, when someone said that – أنا بلا أنا ونحن – i.e., 'I am without I and we are without we', which meant that human beings, though present in their actions are also absent from them. Similarly, when someone

said that, — أنا من أهوى ومن أهوى أنا فإذا أبصرتني أبصرتنا <sup>98</sup> it, on the one hand, created misconception about the identity of Allah, and on the other, was a declaration of helplessness. A similar judgment can be made about the famous Sufi expression هو بلا هو <sup>99</sup> — i.e., He is without He. The *tawheed* of Allah is something different. Some opined that He is He, but no one has the power to carry out the full responsibility of calling Him so, nor had any writer the capability of writing it down and convey all its dimensions. Basically, such debates seem to have emanated from the Qur'anic verse — لَتَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَفِدَ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّي and it seems as though this verse was reverberating in the hearts and minds of the scholastic mystics. The mystics who, like other Muslim intellectuals of the time, received the deep impact of scholasticism and its methods of interpretation, regarded it an art to present a plane truth in a dramatic way so that the listeners stood spellbound. For a moment it would seem to them that the mystic had opened a new world of meaning for them. For example, from the expression — إِنَّهُ هُوَ — <sup>100</sup> بادي بلا بادي the mystics drew the saying: بادي بلا بادي <sup>100</sup>. Some said, 'I am the Sarmad of the time' (*waqti masarmad*). <sup>101</sup> Possibly, the person meant that the ocean that he had taken refuge in was a limitless one. All these instances of hair splitting drew their sustenance, at one level or another, from the verses where it was said to be an impossible task to write down the attributes of Allah the Almighty. However, the adoption of scholastic ways in their explanations and interpretations placed the mystics in the position of exactly such an impossible task that had been negated in the Qur'anic system of thought.

The mystics had different standards of *tawheed* for the common people and the special individuals, as we have made clear in the context of the vision of Allah (*mushahida-e haq*). For these special people, it was possible, through spirituality rather than learning, to explore the secrets of *tawheed* which was inaccessible for the common people. That is why the notion that the secrets of *tawheed* which they considered as the issue of the Unity of Being, should not be described before anybody and everybody, got ready acceptability among the mystics. It was a secret that was better kept under wraps. Some mystics even held the opinion that the calamities visited upon the earlier communities were merely because they chose to unravel the secret of the Unity of Being. The concealment of this basic belief of mysticism and its defense led to a kind of secondary position occupied by the mystics. They became the custodians of a truth that could not be expressed in public. This was the sort of situation encountered by the mystics of the Israelites, as a consequence of which they fabricated the axiom that everyone should not be taught the secret knowledge of the Torah, and not more than one at a time, in any case.

As opposed to the Qur'anic concept of *tawheed*, where Allah's identity is defined as – لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ – the Sufi concept of *tawheed* merges Allah's identity with the universe to such an extent that He cannot be seen to retain his own special identity. When this notion gains acceptability that whatever exists in the world is an extension of God's existence, that the non-God has no existence, then the dividing line between Truth and Falsehood gets blurred and obfuscated. Then it becomes possible for the mystic to say that the Pharaoh was right in declaring – أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى – that Pharaoh was not separate from Allah's self, even though he was outwardly present there in the image of Pharaoh.<sup>102</sup>

According to the monistic philosophy an individual does not have a separate identity, nor does any object in the phenomenal world have any individual existence of its own. When Hallaj began his letter to his disciple with the expression – من الرحمن الرحيم, it indicated that whatever he wrote in that letter was from Allah, because the hand was merely a tool that moved only when it was made to do so. Hallaj's concept of *tawheed* that is known as *mas'la jama'* took him to the stage where he claimed to be, as it were, ensconced in the seat of Allah. He went so far as to say, 'I am the one who had destroyed the clan of Noah and the communities of Aad and Thamud.'<sup>103</sup> Some renowned mystics, (for instance, Ibn Arabi) expressed the view that when Allah enters into the self of a person, then though outwardly the latter remains a slave (of Allah), but beyond the human perception, he becomes Allah. According to him, the expression – وَأَتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا – meant the merger of Abraham in Allah's Self, or the entrance of Allah in Abraham's self. The Sufi concept of *tawheed* obliterated the distinction between the worshipper and the object of worship. Rather, while explicating the verse – أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ – Ibn Arabi opined that the worship of anything was not separate from the worship of Allah, even if it was the worship of human desires. When no distinction remained in the identity of God and His slave and when both the worshipper and the worshipped were said to be imprisoned in the One, then the Qur'anic concept of slavery to God became totally irrelevant. That is why in case of some mystics, when they reached a certain stage of their mystical and spiritual journey, they felt that there was no need for them to perform any more religious rituals or duties. It is said about Bayazid Bustami that when Allah called him to His side and said, 'My slave, We want to see you,' he requested Allah to invest him with His Unity, His 'Splendid Isolation,' and take him to the level of His Unity, so that when people saw him they would feel they had sighted God. 'At that moment only You would be there and not me.'<sup>104</sup> God's dissolution into a human being, or for the human being seeing the grandeur of God in himself is such a stage of *fana fil-fana* where only He is



there and the devotee becomes oblivious of himself. This is the Sufi concept of *tawheed* which is supposed to signify the pinnacle of spiritual knowledge (*ma'refat*), and which made the mystics utter expressions like – سبحاني ما أعظم شأنني – or, ما في جبتي إلا الله، ملكي – or ما في جبتي إلا الله. أعظم من ملك الله. But despite this clear instance of straying away from the religious path which is known, in the term of mysticism as *shat'h*, the mystics claimed that the secrets of *tawheed* explored by them were pregnant with deep meaning. While explicating the saying – سبحاني ما أعظم شأنني – attributed to Bayazid Bustami, Dataganj has written that the utterer of this was Allah Almighty in the guise of a human being.<sup>105</sup>

The monotheistic philosophy, despite its entire predilection for creating controversies, could not establish itself as the authentic interpretation of *tawheed*, even though the shadow of these controversies has often vitiated the Muslim thought. This non-Qur'anic concept of *tawheed* gave birth to different strands of popular poetry in the languages of the East which had the popular Muslim mind firmly in its grip through religious gatherings, mystic assemblies and devotional songs,<sup>106</sup> to the extent that those traditional Muslim scholars who expended all their energies in refuting *wahdatul wajood* (monism) could not extricate themselves wholly from its impact. For example, in opposition to Unity of Being, monism, Alauddin Simnani (d.736 hijra) advanced the concept of Unity of Manifestation (*Wahdatul Shahood*) which was, to a large extent, another manifestation of this heretic thought. According to this point of view, even if the universe itself is not the extension of God, it is certainly His shadow. In the later years, Shah Waliullah tried to synthesize or co-relate these two views. He considered it a mere difference of terms or nomenclature. Considered closely, even Shah Waliullah who is known to have struck a middle course between the manifest and hidden systems of thought, and who is considered reliable by the common Muslims for his adherence to the non-mystic jurisprudence (*fiqh zwahir*), could not free himself totally from the tentacles of 'Ana al-Haqq'. Though he is not an adherent of the philosophy of *Wahdatul Wajood*, he seems to advocate similar views through the use of a different set of terms. He opines when a person performs *nawafil* to an extraordinary degree, then a kind of heavenly light (*noor*) enters his soul through the agency of the angels, so that the entire existence of the soul depends on this light. In other words, this Divine Light becomes the abode for the soul of that person.<sup>107</sup> This notion of the Divine Light entering an individual and encompassing his soul is basically akin to the notion that, in alien terminology, known as *hulool*, i.e. man's merger with God. The terms used by Waliullah are also alien, although he looks for the basis of this alien thought in a Qur'anic simile – مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ – and does

not feel any qualms in citing the authority of a fabricated Qur'anic verse which, according to him, has been attributed to Ibn Abbas. The verse in question ran somewhat like this: مثل نوره في قلب مومن كمشكوة فيها مصباح, from which one could draw the meaning that Allah's effulgence could inhere in man, and the analogy could be that it was a niche in which a burning lamp was placed.<sup>108</sup>

The truth is that through the means of *tawheed* the mystics, rather than depending on the statements in the Qur'an, gave extraordinary importance to the views of the mystics. As a result, the Qur'anic view of *tawheed* disappeared from their thoughts. The efforts to provide a Qur'anic basis to *Wahdatul Wajood* and *Wahdatul Shahud* compelled them to manipulate and distort the Divine Revelation. They held their supreme mentor Ibn Arabi in such high esteem that they had reservations in declaring his clear violation of the Qur'an as deviation and distortion; rather, they considered their Faith (*iman*) to be in danger if they did so.<sup>109</sup> The problem was that the whole thrust of *Wahdatul Wajood* clearly negated the Qur'anic concept of *tawheed*. In these circumstances, some great Islamic scholar-mystics outwardly maintained their distance from Ibn Arabi but they could not muster up enough courage to refute his heretical views. For example, Shah Waliullah who is known for his efforts to reconcile *Wahdatul Wajood* with *Wahdaul Shahud* appears, in his writings about mysticism, to be an out and out monist. In *Infas al-Arifeen* he wrote about the spiritual experiences of his uncle, that once his uncle turned to his own names and attributes, he could sight even more than 99 names. And as he probed further, the names and attributes became numberless. Then there came a stage when, in the words of Shah Waliullah, he saw that he was creating the universe, and destroying it too. His claim was that the great *walis* often had such experiences.<sup>110</sup>

Shah Waliullah has recorded an anecdote about his father that he joined a group of people who were going to have a vision of God. As the time of salah approached, these people chose him to be the imam. After the salah was over, his father asked these people: 'Who are you searching for so earnestly?' they answered, 'Allah who is the Truth.' Shah Waliullah reports that his father said to them, 'It is me who you are searching for'. His father reported that those people got up and began to shake his hands.<sup>111</sup> From such accounts it is not difficult to infer how the misguided monistic concept of *tawheed* had vitiated the thoughts of the thinkers and the mystics.

### PROPHETHOOD VERSUS THE ESSENCE OF MUHAMMED

Once the Sufi system of thought stepped out of the paradigm of *tawheed*, the other fundamental tenets of the Faith also could not remain intact. The status of

Muhammad, Allah's Prophet as the last messenger, and that in his hands the religion of Islam has reached completion are such fundamental tenets of Islamic Faith that even a slight modification in them had the power to take Muslim thinking to the path of distortion as we find in the cases of earlier communities. The Qur'an clearly declared this dual aspect of Muhammad – as a Prophet and as a man – so that the believers, at any historical epoch, should not fall victim to excessive veneration in their devotion to the Prophet and miss the essential aspect of his august position. The mystics, on the one hand, showed excessive devotion to the institution of prophethood and took it to the sublime heights occupied by Allah; on the other, they pulled it down to the ordinary level occupied by the mystics and *walis*. In other words, as far as the office of prophethood is concerned, the mystics could be blamed both for sublimating it to the divine plane and for reducing it to the profane level. First, it was asserted that whatever was there in the visible universe was only a manifestation of Muhammad's effulgence. There was no dearth of traditions among the mystics where it was stated – أول ما خلق الله نورى or that – كنت نبيا وآدم بين الماء والطين. From the point of view of the mystics, what Allah created first of all is the effulgence of Muhammad. It was said that in terms of creation he was the first and in terms of manifestation, the last. He is the first intellect of the effulgence of prophethood. The prophetic light that continued from Adam through all the prophets was, in fact, the effulgence of Muhammad and achieved its perfection in him. That is to say, the Mohammadan effulgence was a kind of light that was there before Names and Attributes and before the creation of Time and Space. But the story does not end there, because in the framework of the Faith, *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* is the first of the six stages of cosmic creation (*tanazzulate sittah*). In other words, when Allah wished to reveal Himself, then its first manifestation was in the form of *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*, and then the same *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* began to manifest itself in different forms, and then in Muhammad it manifested itself in all its glory. From لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ رُّسُلِهِ the mystics drew the meaning that this effulgence manifested itself from Adam to Muhammad, and therefore, no distinction should be made between them. This is *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* on which, according to mystics, 'depends the do's and don'ts of the world and which has been the center of existence from the beginning of the world to its end.<sup>112</sup> All efforts were made to designate *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* as the Cause of all causes.

It has been said that Allah poured His first light into the soul of Muhammad. Since he is the first receiver of Allah's Light, his celestial ascension is believed to be an indicator of his spiritual proximity to Allah. To the Sufis, the Qur'anic expression *qab-e-qausain* (bows and arrows) carries this connotation. It is said that 'this is the height

of the Prophet's intuition and vision. His personality effaced in the existence of Allah in an unconventional way, that is to say, without the spiritual strife and mystical exercises undertaken by the Sufis.<sup>113</sup> It implies that the true recognition of the Prophet is the first step towards recognizing Allah's Light. Thereafter, Allah poured His soul into Adam which resulted in the creation of man whom Allah created in the best mould. Thus, the light was cast into substantial form.<sup>114</sup> Six categories of lights with the light of the Prophet in them as the central pivot as mentioned by the Sufis is basically the explanation of this monistic philosophy which is described as the method of cognition of Allah by the Sufis on the strength of their divine inspiration. It is acknowledged as a scientific system in Sufi paradigm which is the central pivot of the entire universe.<sup>115</sup>

As *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* is supposed to be the moving spirit behind the universe and it is the same spirit which, according to the mystics, was infused into Adam – the Sufi looks at man as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm. That is to say, *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* is the basis of *haqiqat-e Insaniyah*. In different epochs of history, the mystics belonging to the monistic strand of thought have claimed Godhood from time to time, and this claim can be understood easily in the light of *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*. According to this notion, the origin of the human soul can be traced back to *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* which is, basically, the first stage of Allah's grandeur. In a manner of speaking, if one does not take shelter behind specialized terms, it can be said that the entity that inhered in the self of Muhammad was nothing else but the perfectionised form of *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*. Some mystics coined the term, 'the Perfect Man' (*insaan-i kamil*) in place of *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*, and expressed the view that the Perfect Human Being is the qutb who holds the pivot for the movement of the skies and that in every age it manifests itself in different forms.<sup>116</sup> In the Sufi paradigm, God, Muhammad or the *auliya* possessing the power to perform miracles are not separate entities. The popular poetry of the following kind

وہی جو مستوی عرش تھا خدا ہو کر      اتر پڑا ہے مدینے میں مصطفیٰ ہو کر

*He who sat on the Empyrean Throne as God*

*Has descended in Medina as Mustafa*

represents the same idea in a straightforward way that upsets the common believers. However, the same idea, when expressed through the garb of complex mystic terms such as *noor-e Muhammadi* or *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*, very few people realize that they were confronting a disagreeable and blasphemous notion. It is said that once Muhammad asked Gabriel, 'Where do you bring the message from? Did you ever see Allah talking to you?' According to this report, Gabriel said, 'Allah always speaks from

behind a veil. How can I bear to set eyes on Allah Almighty?' Muhammad said, 'Go, lift the veil and see.' It is said that when Muhammad said this, he was wearing his turban. When Gabriel lifted the veil from the Empyrean Throne, he saw that there was none but Muhammad there, tucking in the ends of his turban.<sup>117</sup> One also finds accounts of the following kind fairly widespread among people that when Muhammad, during his ascension to heaven lifted the veil to see Allah Almighty, he found that there was none else there but himself.

On the one hand, the mystics took Muhammad, through *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*, to the heights of Allah Almighty, and propagated the idea that all the affairs of the world are conducted through *rooh-e Muhammadi* or *haqiqat-e Muhammadi*. On the other hand, they pulled down the status of prophethood to the level of the common *auliya*. Ibn Arabi expressed the idea that what is common in all – from Adam to Muhammad and Muhammad to the *auliya* – is, in fact the splendor of Muhammad's light through which the *auliya* acquire power over the elements of the universe. Rather, on one occasion, while stressing the importance of the *qutb* he went so far as to assert that when someone becomes a *qutb*, first of all, the First Intellect offers his spiritual allegiance to him, and then the denizens of the heaven and the earth, the wind and the all then three realms do so<sup>118</sup>. It can be understood easily through the Sufi Hadith – *أول ما خلق الله العقل* – that this intellect is nothing but another name for *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* that is manifested in the person of the prophets to the *auliya* and to the *qutb*. In the sufi realm, the *qutb* is even a degree above the prophet; the *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* which is, as it were, the essence of Allah Almighty, is compelled to offer allegiance to the *qutb*. The *qutbs* are said to be so powerful that they can even dismiss God from Godhood. In the words of Ibn Arabi, 'From Adam to Muhammad, 25 *qutbs* had been sent to the earth.' Sometimes he says that from Adam to Muhammad, there was just one *qutb* who used to help all prophets, messengers and *qutbs*, and it was the sacred soul of Muhammad. However, in his own age and time, he described his encounter with the contemporary *qutb*.<sup>119</sup> Ibn Arabi remarked that in each age, there was a *qutb* and that with the advent of the new *qutb* the teachings of the old *qutb* are abrogated.<sup>120</sup> These statements should be seen in the light of the earlier statements where it has been said that the soul of Muhammad is manifested in all the *qutbs*. In this way, Ibn Arabi not only made Muhammad, the last prophet, subservient to the *qutb*, but opened the door for *qutb*hood which, according to him, was superior to prophethood, for the spiritual figures of the future generations. Muhammad was divided into *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* or *noor-e Muhammadi*, and scattered all around the universe. The honourable *qutb* acquired the position by virtue of which he, like

Allah, took the reins of controlling the universe in his own hands. This idea, i.e., the ultimate refuge for the mystics lay with the Abdul Qadir Jilani, the *qutb* of the universe, rather than the Lord of the universe, received wide acceptance among the populace. The common people began to believe that even the sun did not rise without saluting Abdul Qadir Jilani.<sup>121</sup>

The concept of *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* and the complex interpretations of the Six Stages of the descent of the Prophetic Light<sup>122</sup> were, basically, an effort to offer Islamic tone and tenor to the monistic philosophy. Once the grip on *tawheed* slackens, and misconceptions develop about prophethood, then human imagination can create all sorts of gods. Such was the case with the Islamic mystics. The consequence of splitting God into lights and attempting to place the mystics in the seat of God through *haqiqat-e Muhammadi* was that very soon the Sufi thinking fell victim to a kind of paganism. Along with the *qutb* came the concept of the Invisible Men (*rijal al-ghaib*)<sup>123</sup> who were said to have occult powers over the elements of the universe. The mystics displaced God from Godhood and devised an elaborate system of administration consisting of the *qutb*, the *ghauth*, *abdal*, *afrad*, *aotad*, *najeeb*, *naqeeb* etc.<sup>124</sup> In this new system, the *qutbs* and their followers have power over the elements of the universe, where the divine inspiration is a continuing feature, where the souls of the dead mentors are always ready to come to the rescue of the living disciples, and where if the mystics spit into hell, the hell fire is extinguished.<sup>125</sup> The concept of the last Divine Revelation and the last Prophet seemed to have become obsolete. Just as the interpretations and explications by the jurists had created a class of the clergy in the form of the great lawgivers, similarly the mystics went even a step further and placed a group of spiritual figures in the place of God Himself. The claimants of the Divine vision, and the people who were said to have reached the status of *fana-fillah* and *baqa-billah* considered themselves to have reached the spiritual heights where other human beings should surrender themselves unconditionally to them. In fact, they went even further than this and allowed other human beings, who were just like themselves, to prostrate before them.<sup>126</sup>

### THE SUFI QUR'AN

To accord respectability to the new system the mystics, naturally, felt the need for new divine revelations and divine inspirations. The Sufi orbit of thinking was continually working itself out of the Qur'anic paradigm and erecting its structure on an alien territory where, practically, the belief in the termination of prophethood was thrown to the winds. Many small claimants to prophethood emerged in the form of

*qutb* or *wali* who were giving people information about new divine lights through their divine inspirations and explorations. In the circumstances, it was not difficult to compile books comprising new divine inspirations. The truth is, if the Qur'an had been accepted as the last and the eternal text of the Divine Revelation, and if the mystics had not subverted the concept of the termination of prophethood through the institution of *wali*, then it would not have been possible either to place Abdul Qadir Gilani in the position of *Ghaus al-Azam*, or to pave the way for the compilation of the books of divine inspirations by Ibn Arabi, the supreme ideologue of the mystics, or the emergence, from time to time, of the *mujaddid* or *mahdi*, of which one hears too often. It would not have been possible for anyone to claim that he was the *mujaddid* of the millennium, nor for anyone to dare to claim that he was immortal and the one in whom all the streams of Sufism had been concentrated, and no one would have dared to say that the blessings and benedictions that descend on people who have the cognition of Allah are merely the offshoots of the radiance of the Prophet.<sup>127</sup>

The misconception that grew about the essence of the Divine Revelation made enough room for the mystics to incorporate their dubious thoughts. It was generally assumed that whatever the monistic mystics – from Hallaj to Shah Waliullah – had been saying had some kind of relationship with the heavens. For example, Shah Waliullah remarked about Abdul Qadir Gilani: إن الشيخ عبد القادر له شعبة من السريان في العالم انه لما مات صار بهيئة الملاء الاعلى وانطبع فيه الوجود الساري في العالم كله وذلك<sup>128</sup> Manazir Ahsan Gilani expressed the view that the secrets revealed by Ibn Arabi were vital not only because they would have remained hidden from the scholars of Islam, but because they were actually part of the divine scheme. Had Ibn Arabi not done so he probably would have been burnt.<sup>129</sup> What to say about these great sheikhs? Shah Waliullah opined that it was possible for those who had a deeper knowledge of the terms to be invested with the wisdom of prophethood, to see the angels of the higher realms, to have the knowledge of the secrets of worship, and they would even be knowledgeable about what was going to happen in future.<sup>130</sup> And, as Shah Waliullah belonged to the same group, the knowledge about the Unknown and its manifestations occurred too frequently in his discourse.<sup>131</sup>

The terms such as *ilham* and *kashf* paved the way for the privileged access to the Divine Revelation by only a special group of people, and it led to the impression that the emergence of mystics like Abdul Qadir Gilani and Ibn Arabi was in continuity of the chain of prophethood and that these figures worked towards the completion of the religion that had come through the Prophet. As stated by Waliullah, because of these spiritual figures it became easier to reach Allah and through the light of their

blessedness and benediction the atmosphere of both the celestial regions and nether world was illuminated.<sup>132</sup> These misconceptions of the orthodox ulema provided an ideological basis for the divine inspirations of the mystics. Soon, there was a deluge of new books consisting of divine inspirations – some of these texts were written in philosophical prose and some in the form of emotive poetry. Soon, these books came to acquire a central position in the organization and conduct of the spiritual life of the people.

Books like *Fusoos Al-Hekam* and *Futoohat Makkiyah* could not become the book of ritual recitation because of their complicated style, but the mystics, in search of deeper meanings, always accorded these books great importance. The following books pertaining to mysticism were considered reliable because of their antiquity: *Al-Ri'ayah* by Harith Muhasibi (d.243 hijra), *Al-Sidq* by Saeed bin Isa Al-Khiraj (d.286 hijra), *Al-Lama'* by Abu Bakr Sarraj (d.287), *Quwwat Al-Quloob* by Abu Talib Makki (d.386), and the *Risala Qushairiyah* by Abul Qasim Al-Qushairi (d.465 hijra). Apart from the above books, Ghazali's *Ahya Al-Uloom* deserves special mention because it can justifiably be called the manifesto of the New Islam. The fact is, the concept of the Faith currently prevalent among a large section of the ummah derives its sustenance not from the Qur'an but from this mystic concept of Islam. Besides, the writings of Abdul Qadir Gilani and Shahabuddin Suharwardi have had an important role to play in the making of this new version of the Faith. Among Shah Waliullah's books, *Ham'at* and *Fuad Al-Haramain* can also be said to belong to the same tradition. However, the books by mystics that have acquired the status of ritual and regular recitation are those that consist of the collections of specific verses and prayers that were claimed to contain mystical and occult powers. One can mention the prayer known as *Musabbe'at-e A'shr*, claimed to have been revealed to Ibrahim Al-Timi through *ilqa* and other secret modes, and which also contained Qur'anic verses that gave it a certain measure of respectability. Everyone was convinced of its great efficacy.<sup>133</sup> It is said about Ibrahim Al-Timi that he was given the secrets of *Masabbi'at-e Ashr* by Khizr and that he (Khizr) had learnt it from the Prophet.<sup>134</sup> Ahmad bin Idris claimed that he had learnt all the special prayers (*zikr*) of Tariqa Shazliya from the Prophet and Khizr, who had appeared to him in person.<sup>135</sup> Sheikh Abul Hasan Shazli's *Hizb Al-Bahr* was considered to be an 'inspirational' book and the stories of its blessedness and great power were often discussed in the assemblies of the mystics. In the words of Shah Waliullah, it should be considered as among his spiritual miracles<sup>136</sup>. We have already referred to the supposed 'inspirational' nature of *Fusoos Al-Hekam* and *Futoohat* in the earlier pages. In the words of Ibn Arabi, 'these books contain the secrets that were



revealed to me by Allah during my spiritual meditation'.<sup>137</sup> He also claimed that he had received Divine commandment to complete this book.<sup>138</sup>

Among the sacred books of the mystics, *Awarif Al-Ma'rif* by Sheikh Suharwardi deserves special mention. It is said that Farid Ganjshakr used to teach it to his followers and disciples.<sup>139</sup> It is said about Sheikh Yaqoob (d.798 hijra) that he used to teach *Fusoos* with great zest. He even died in this state.<sup>140</sup> It is said about Alauddin Neeli, a khalifa of Mahboob Ilahi that he had such reverence for the mentor's book, *Fawaaidul Al-Fuad* that he had copied the whole of it with his own hand. He would always remain busy in studying it. When people wanted to know the reason of his extraordinary attachment to these texts, he is reported to have replied, 'My salvation depends on them.'<sup>141</sup> The mystics have written elaborate commentaries and interpretations on these fabricated 'inspirational' books. For example, Abdul Quddus Gangohi has written the commentary on *Awarif* and prepared the footnotes of *Fusoos*.<sup>142</sup> Shah Muhibbullah Ilahabadi (d.1058 hijra) used to memorize Sheikh Akbar's writings to understand them properly. It is also said about him that he wrote several commentaries on *Fusoos*.<sup>143</sup> The *Masnawi* by Maulana Rum was regarded respectfully even by the orthodox ulema. And this, despite Maulana Rum's dubious ideas and his excessive predilection for the monistic philosophy. Rather, some great Islamic scholars even expressed the view that as far as the meaning is concerned, there is no objection to designate *Mathnavi* as the Qur'an in the Pahlavi language.<sup>144</sup>

The religious dimensions of these books written by the mystics had become so consolidated that even the orthodox scholars of Islam used to read them as spiritual and semi-divine texts. As has been admitted by Manazir Ahsan Gilani, for the removal of his difficulties he used to study the above two books (i.e., *Mathnavi* and *Futuh*) in addition to the Qur'an.<sup>145</sup> Ashraf Ali Thanavi used to advise his disciples that when their hearts began to fail them because of spiritual strifes they should read the poetic couplets of Hakeem Sanai. He is also reported to have advised people to read, besides the Qur'an, *Dalail Al-Khairat* and *Pandnama Attar*. On top of it, he exhorted people to read the prayer devised by Hakim Sanai at the time of *tahajjud* and opined that by reading it, the devotee would 'stay in close relationship with prophethood.'<sup>146</sup>

The new *ilhams* did not only devise new ways of worship, but soon the Muslim society got trapped in the cult of new spiritual figures or mini gods. Now the spiritual centers of the believers were not mosques but mystic hospices and shrines where the Sufi mystic, who claimed to have direct rapport with Allah, would organize the spiritual life of the believers. Mysticism had changed the aim of the devotee. The spiritual states of *mushahidat Haq*, *fana fillah* and *baqa billah* could not have been

achieved through the regular salah that Islam has prescribed for all believers. Thus, the mystics, in the light of their *ilham* and *kashf* devised such unique kinds of salah about which one does not find even the remotest suggestion in the Muslim society of the first century of Islam. These prayers were devised for different objectives. For example, Al-Buni devised a special kind of new salah known as *salat al-rooh* which would facilitate a meeting with the souls of the Prophet and his Companions, in which it was instructed that after the salah the devotee should close his eyes, look up at the sky, look sideways on the right and on the left, walk forward and backward and mutter some specific words.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, to get out of difficulties, two units (*rak'ats*) of *Salat Al-Salwat* were said to be efficacious.<sup>148</sup> For remaining steadfast in the way of belief, *Salat Al-Iman*<sup>149</sup> was suggested, and for ailment of the eye, some specific salah and specific incantations were suggested.<sup>150</sup> Various other kinds of salah were devised, such as, *Salat Al-Buruj*,<sup>151</sup> *Salat Al-Sa'dat*,<sup>152</sup> *Salat Al-Ashiqeen*,<sup>153</sup> *Salat Al-Qurbat*<sup>154</sup> in which specific verses were prescribed to be read in specific orders. Another such salah was named, *Salat Laila Al-Raghaib*<sup>155</sup> and it was claimed that whoever performed this salah was blessed with endless gifts. Some incredible kinds of salah were also devised in which it was required that the person had to hang upside down in the well, and which required much practice. In the terms of mysticism, it was called *salah ma'kus*.<sup>156</sup> The way these verses were used as formulae and the promise of different kinds of advantages or efficacy from different formula were, in effect, due to the impact of numerological sciences. However, despite all these misconceptions the seeker could only supplicate from God through these formulae. In the new religious framework put in place by the mystics the *auliya* were placed in the position of having powers over the elements of the universe, and in the very nature of things, it was necessary that special kinds of ritualistic salah were devised to seek things from the *auliya*. When a mystic of the stature of Albuni could devise special verses and incantation to tap the secret powers of the Qur'anic verses, it was natural to surmise that special kinds of worship were needed to tap the powers of Allah's *auliya*. In clear terms, one can say that some of the salah devised by the mystics sought things directly from dead persons. Sometimes, the occult powers of these supposed spiritual figures were declared to be greater than even those of God. Some mystics used to exhort their followers to pray to Allah in the following way: 'Allah, in deference to the moment when you struck a truce with Khwaja Ahmad Nehawandi, please fulfill my wish.'<sup>157</sup> Such incantations (*zikr*) were devised about which it was claimed that if one read it one thousand times in the month of Rajab his salvation was guaranteed. According to Sufi Hadith, Allah has said that 'If I do not forgive the chanter of this incantation out of kindness, I am not his

God.<sup>158</sup> Some mystics exhorted their followers to perform the salah of Khwaja Owais Qarni, in the month of Rajab, about whom it was said that, on the spiritual plane, he was among the Prophet's Companions even though he had no opportunity to meet the Prophet. It was claimed that if the seeker performed the salah of Khwaja Ahmad Owaisi then all the doors of knowledge were opened to him.<sup>159</sup> Besides these, among the orthodox Muslims, the 'Salah of Fatima' was said to be efficacious in fulfilling their wishes. It was advised that after this special salah, the person should advance eleven steps towards the qibla.<sup>160</sup> Another salah of this kind that became a part of the religious knowledge of common Muslims and it was *Salat Al-Isra*, about which it was said that it was advised by Abdul Qadir Gilani. In this salah, apart from the special arrangement of Qur'anic verses, it was advised that the person should utter "ضعيف بر درى قوي" and "نيازمند بر درى نيازى" in the state of prostration (*sajda*). It was also exhorted that the person should hold the prayer rug on the reverse side, utter – نگر دم بارتابه كى حاجت روا – a hundred times, and while doing so, should advance eleven steps towards the *qibla* and present his plea before Allah.<sup>161</sup> In some other methods or sources, it was exhorted that the person should advance towards Baghdad and not towards the *qibla*. Salah such as *Salat Al-Tasbih*, *Salat Al-Hajat*, *Salat Al-Khauf*, *Salat Khizr*, *Salat Awwabin*, *Salat Istikhara*, *Salat Al-Noor*, *Salat Al-Ghausia*, and so on and so forth also belonged to similar categories of salah devised by the mystics to answer for different kinds of needs.

Apart from devising different kinds of special salah, the mystics borrowed modes and methods of worship and meditation from alien religious cultures. New methods of litanies, religious songs (e.g. *qawwali*), the beats of tambourine,<sup>162</sup> the instructions to girls as to how to get people infatuated with them,<sup>163</sup> the assemblies of dance and ecstasy were given currency as means of attaining spiritual maturity, which were all borrowed from ancient religious and cultural traditions. The belief gained widespread currency among Muslims that through them human beings attained the spiritual state not attainable through the ordinary salah prescribed by sharia. Thus, it is said about some venerable Sufis that during the sessions of dance and inebriation when they were reminded about the salah, they replied casually that they were indeed in the state of salah.<sup>164</sup> Not only salah, but also other established modes and rituals of worship lost their value in Sufi thinking. Apart from the white days (*baidh*), (i.e., the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of every month) that have a special significance for the mystics, the mystics devised 40-day long fasting. In the words of Sheikh Suharwardi, Allah invests the person who keeps his stomach free of foodstuff, with secret knowledge.<sup>165</sup> As the aims of the religion of the mystics were radically different, there were no reasons why the advocates of this new religion should have adhered to the traditional Islamic system of

worship. If the Sufis have advocated visiting the graves of the great Sufis and considered it more efficacious than performing Haj, its reasons can be seen in the notion about the souls of the dead who, according to Shah Waliullah, were capable of performing special miracles even after four hundred or five hundred years after their death. The Sufis exhorted their disciples to visit the graves of the mystics in place of going to Haj and said that if they circumambulated the graves of some great mystics seven times over, it would fulfill the conditions of performing Haj.<sup>166</sup> The Sufis did not feel the necessity of Islamic customs and rituals because, according to Khwaja Moinuddin Al-Haq, 'A haji circumambulated the ka'ba with his body while a mystic circumambulated the Empyrean realm and *hijab-e azmat* in his spiritual ecstasy.'<sup>167</sup> He went even a step further and claimed that, 'Earlier, for a long time, I used to circumambulate around the Ka'ba, but now the Ka'ba circumambulates around me'.<sup>168</sup> As the aims of worship changed in the new faith, a need arose not only to make changes and modify the older methods of worship, different kinds of new salah and fastings were devised, for Haj new centers were invented in place of Ka'ba, but a whole new system of worship was brought in place the entire basis of which lay in the inspirations and so-called visions of the mystics. The Sufi concept of litanies, i.e., *zikr* is a logical extension of this notion.

The method of litanies recorded in the books of the great mystics contain the deep impact of alien sources as far as their objectives and external manifestations are concerned. So much so that the methods in vogue regarding the 'hidden litanies' (*zikr khafi*) or 'manifest litanies' (*zikr jali*) among the mystics of the first order were, to a great extent, borrowed from the Aryan culture. For example, the method suggested by Shah Waliullah for the litany of لا اله الا الله cannot be traced back to the first century of Islam. He says that the devotee should utter لا اله الا الله in such a way that the utterance of 'لا' should begin from below the windpipe, and 'اله' should be uttered in the mind and then 'الا الله' should be uttered in great force so that the heart feels its pressure.<sup>169</sup> And that when the devotee utters لا اله الا الله with his tongue then all feelings for non-Allah, even its very existence, should be thrown out of his mind. As he proceeds further, he says, when the devotee feels his heart filling up with zest and emotion he should utter لا اله الا الله with greater force, and as the ecstasy or frenzy increases, he should utter لا اله الا الله with greater and greater force and in greater frequency, and he should single out الا الله for greater emphasis.<sup>170</sup> He says that among the majority of those following the Sufi way (*tariqa*), there is a general consensus on swaying the head, putting pressure on the heart and allowing people concessions in matters emitting sounds from different places of the body while uttering لا اله الا الله, for according to

them, by doing so the devotee attains a sense of content and fulfillment.<sup>171</sup> Shah Waliullah says, if a person totally dismisses loud litanies (*zikh-e jahr*) it is merely his obstinacy.<sup>172</sup> This particular method of *zikh-e jahr* in which 'La' is uttered from below the windpipe, 'Allah' is said in the mind and the heart is lashed with 'لا الله' is a self-styled mode of worship which was not only an alien thought in the religious thinking of Muslims, but also, to a large extent, it was borrowed from the ways of the Buddhist monks and the system of yoga. We do not know why, despite the presence of familiar, well-established ways of worship, the mystics felt the need to devise newer methods of worship. In the context of the changing spiritual needs of the individual, from the period of the Prophet to the period of Sheikh Akbar, if we accept the ways of the mystics then only the older methods of worship and their conventional forms could not fulfil the purpose. However, these newer forms of worship herald the Book of Guidance of a new religion. Unfortunately, many of our religious scholars seem to be under the spell of the mystics and do not want to recognize their false beliefs and their alarming implications.

Though the mystics claim that the newer forms of litanies can lead the soul of the devotee through a succession of stages of progress to the Exalted Presence (*hazirat al-quds*),<sup>173</sup> the methods that have been suggested for such litanies were, if not borrowed from the yoga, certainly the parody of the salah. Shah Waliullah suggests that the person who wants to undertake open litanies (*zikh-e jali*) should first sit on all fours i.e. with the toes and palms on the ground, then with the big toe and the adjacent toe of his right feet he should proceed to take hold of the vein called *kimas*. He further says that in this litany the devotee should sit with the greatest concentration towards *qibla*, as in salah, then he should utter لا اله الا الله with stressing the required syllables and breath in such a way that he should extract 'لا' from the navel and pull it up to the right shoulder, and then he should throw out 'اله' from the membrane of the brain as though he is throwing out the love for everything else, except Allah, from his mind. Then he should take the next breath and lash his heart with 'لا الله' with full force.<sup>174</sup> The devotee was also instructed that while uttering لا اله الا الله he should firmly maintain the states of لا محبوب الا الله, then لا مقصود الا الله, and then in the climax of ecstasy, لا موجود لا الله in his heart and mind. As these methods of worship devised by the mystics were their own personal innovations or subjective inspiration, they could not arrive at a consensus about any single method. The method of *zikh* among adherents of the Qadiriyya order was said to be different from that prevalent among the adherents of the Naqshbandiya order, and some practicing mystics made changes in the method of *zikh* and selection of words on their own. The impression had become widespread that

the knowledge of the spiritual mentors (*mashaikh*) and their spiritual guidance had the status of incontrovertible primary authority in the religion, of the order of the Qur'an and the sunnah. The devotee had no other option than accepting the instructions and exhortations of the Sheikh unconditionally and unquestioningly. It was also believed that the same *zikr* or the same prayer could not be efficacious for everybody. That is why the disciple's means and method of worship and all the transactions of the disciple's spiritual life became dependent on the Sheikh. Whoever spoke about some new modes of worship, the believers considered it their religious duty to accept them as they were purportedly derived through divine inspiration and other spiritual means. Single-stroke, double-stroke and triple-stroke litanies were devised. Sometimes it was said that mere repetition of 'Allah' was *zikr*, at other times, 'hu' was added to it. Then, there were some other forms of worship which they proudly called as *sultan al-azkaar*, the 'king of litanies'. It was said that the devotee should sit on his haunches, and then first he should slowly breath in, then with his two hands he should seal his two ears, and two eyes and grip his nostrils in such a way that all the orifices are blocked. Then he should touch his palate with his tongue and go on uttering Allah in his mind. So much so that he should feel that he was losing his breath. In this state he should remove his fingers from the nostrils and take three breaths, and then stop his breath. It is said that such exercises would allow the devotee insights into the occult realm, in addition to improving the stamina.<sup>175</sup> The orthodox Muslim scholars raised objections against such modes and methods of worship and litanies practiced by the mystics. They also pointed out that no evidence could be adduced from the times of the Prophet in support of such methods and that these self-styled rituals had no place Islam. But those who had driven themselves crazy to have a vision of the Truth and who were restless to see Allah Almighty in their mind's eye, and who felt, during their spiritual meditation (*muraqba*) that their very being was torn to pieces and getting dissolved, the sky was shattered to pieces, the structure and essence of objects were transformed, were the people whose hallucinations and fits of psychic reality convinced them that in this disintegrating world, their own selves were getting dissolved, and whatever they were seeing was, in fact, Allah's light.<sup>176</sup> Who could convince such psychiatric cases with the arguments culled from the Book and the sunnah? It was a situation where everyday someone who claimed to have effaced himself in Allah (*fana fillah*) would say – *who is Abu Zaid? Where is Abu Zaid? I am searching him* – while the person saying so was none other than Abu Zaid himself.<sup>177</sup> The traditional Islamic scholars used to exhort the believers that if a person closed his eyes and applied his mind to the spiritual world, kept uttering 'Allah, Allah' in his mind, so much so that he forgot about

himself, then a door opened for him.<sup>178</sup> In such a situation there was hardly any possibility for any person to come out of his psychological hallucination or pseudo-spiritual intoxication and make an assessment of the objections of the opponents. Contrary to this, this intoxication of spirituality and the psychological hallucinations of divine inspirations and fancies led the mystics to indulge themselves in false vanity and futile acts and they did not even give greater importance to the Divine Revelation in preference to their own subjective inspirations and fancies. It is said that when a person raised objections against the two-stroke word 'Allah Allah' by saying that it had no validity from sharia, and some grammarians (Razi) opined that it was not correct from the point of view of syntax, Sheikhul Hadith Zakariyah declared that the two-stroke *zikh* was syntactically correct and further stated that this *zikh* was far better than reciting the Qur'anic word (*aufaq bi-alfaz al-Qur'an*)<sup>179</sup> to that defiled person.

The students of history and the Qur'an are intrigued by the phenomenon that the ummah that had a clear awareness of the Divine Revelation, that accept the Prophet Muhammad as the terminal prophet and that took a very strict attitude towards those who claimed prophethood from time to time, got mired in such an intellectual crisis that it was inclined to accept all kinds of so-called divine inspiration and fancies of the mystics. How could it happen that, despite the presence of the Qur'an, the foundation of a new religion was laid that ran counter to the true Islamic Faith? Without looking for an answer to this vital question we can never understand the phenomenon of our intellectual decline, nor can we recognize the bitter truth that the Divine Revelation has been so thickly overlaid with the misconceptions spread by the mystics that we have moved far away from it and have become prisoners of occult powers and inspirations. The irony lies in the fact that we take this new faith to be the real Islam.

The credit for this new version of the religion goes, to a great extent, to Ghazali who is known among the cognoscenti as the 'Last word on Islam' (حجة الإسلام).<sup>180</sup> Ghazali's personal crises, his intellectual disposition and all his sincere efforts for the quest of the Truth failed to rise above specific problems of his time and recognize the realities for what they were. His efforts towards the quest of the Truth, instead of piercing the miasma that enveloped the Divine Revelation, became a synthesis of different schools of thought and attitudes. He became the advocate of an Islam that could be seen, at best, as a kind of compromise formula. To understand this phenomenon, we will have to travel back to the period of Shafei when, in our view, the foundation for the misconceptions was laid. At that time no one could think it in their wildest imagination that the correct interpretation of the Divine Revelation and the

scrutinizing of reports and practices to understand it in historical perspective that had begun at that time would, in the coming years, become a stumbling block in the comprehension of the Divine Revelation, and thus the Divine Revelation would become subservient to history. The debates that had begun from the second century of Islam regarding the roles of reports and practices in the understanding of the Divine Revelation had, in the end, consolidated its position in the hands of Shafei, to the extent that even during the his lifetime, because of his forceful prose and scholastic arguments, they gained the status of an external, secondary and complementary source outside the Qur'an. When the trend started for according a respectable and divine status to the secondary or ancillary sources outside the Divine Revelation, the different reports and practices gave birth to different schools of thought. As we have explained in the chapter on jurisprudence, in formulating its principles and its objectives, jurisprudence had come under the impact of scholasticism right from the moment of its inception. What to speak of jurisprudence, no sphere of Muslim thought could remain immune to the influence of scholasticism, so much so that the assemblies of the mystics also manifested this impact most demonstrably. These practices left a deep impact on the Muslim thinking. Not only that the ancillary sources got greater respectability by the day, but also it happened that jurisprudence, as it got out of the cycle of history and practices, got trapped in people's views. To get out of this quagmire, a group of traditionists came to the fore that tried to establish the precedence of practices over people's views, through *wahi ghair matlu*. But this effort led to a harmful consequence inasmuch as the concept of a supplementary divine revelation, in addition to the principal Divine Revelation, entered permanently in Muslim thinking. Then this idea also emerged that through the person of the Prophet or the practices of the Prophet's Companions, other sources also could attain the status of *nass* for us, and if the objectives of the religious life could be constructed on their basis in the form of jurisprudence, then on what basis could these inspirations, fancies and dreams be declared insubstantial, particularly when the mystics claimed that the Prophet himself appeared in their dreams and instructed them to do certain things? The mystics proffered this argument to establish their credentials as the preferred and more reliable spokesmen of Islam than the jurists. The mystics insisted on the fact that if the traditionists could be regarded as learned men merely on the basis of memorizing reports, and if the jurists could be regarded as the arbiters of the Faith (*tafaqqoh fi al-din*) because of drawing commandments from them, then the mystics were far more deserving of the position that they should be regarded as reliable interpreters of the Faith. This was because they did not content themselves merely with



the propriety of external circumstances but concentrated on the training and the purification of the heart, and thus exploring the deeper meanings of the Faith. According to them, the correct elucidation and interpretation of the Faith required men with pure heart and the mystics were better equipped to discharge this delicate responsibility.<sup>181</sup>

The claim of the mystics that they should be preferred because of their internal strength and purity of heart became an arresting slogan in an epoch when the jurists and their project of Islamic jurisprudence were going through their worst crisis that had thrown the Muslim society in an unending cycle of disputes and disagreements. Factionalism among Islamic scholars on the basis of تفقه في الدين, the religious debates among the scholars, indecent attacks on one another, the skirmishes among the followers of different groups, the rank material pursuits of the ulema in the name of religion, campaigning for the post of the supreme judge and other positions in the court were the activities that had raised serious questions about the credibility of Muslim scholars in people's eyes. In the time of Ghazali the materialistic attitude of the Islamic scholars had become so prominent that if some scholars liked to use the honorific 'malik al-nihaat'<sup>182</sup> before their names, others employed herald to walk in front of the entourage blaring out the slogan – 'here is the master of the masters' ( هذا ملك العلماء).<sup>183</sup> According to Ghazali, they were not the heirs to the divine knowledge but worldly-wise scholars who had come under the influence of the Satan.<sup>184</sup> These were the people who were accumulating the wealth through their learning. This moral decline of the traditional scholars had left the field open for the people who were advocates of the path of renunciation of the world. In the prevailing atmosphere of materialism, these individuals made their advent as the herald of spiritualism. It was not surprising that in an environment that badly reeked of materialism, people would feel a kind of romantic attraction towards the ways of renunciation.

There is no doubt about the fact that a section of the mystics, right from the beginning, were desirous of exploring deeper meanings of the Faith. However, in the initial centuries of Islam, the contours of Islamic mysticism were not clear, nor was it given any social or religious importance.<sup>185</sup> The status of Harith Muhasibi, Junaid Baghdadi, Abu Bakr Shibli and that of other mystics like them, even at the highest point of their popularity, was not higher than that of a mere cult.<sup>186</sup> The books by Muhasibi in which, for the first time, the believers felt a kind of pleasant sensation in the description of spiritual experiences, had their impact on a very small group of believers. Like other books by the mystics, the *Quwwat Al-Quloob* by Abu Talib Makki could not become popular among common Muslims. But when the same book

took on the form of *Ahya Al-Uloom* and a pillar of Islam like Ghazali joined the mission, the Islamic mysticism that had only a peripheral presence in Muslim thinking so far came to acquire center stage. The intellectual journey chronicled in المنقذ من الضلال did not remain the journey of an individual but it became the journey of the entire ummah. In subsequent years, this new Islam discovered by Ghazali began to assert itself so aggressively that the other possible forms of Islam receded to the background.

Ghazali, who had started his intellectual journey under the tutelage of traditional ulema and who had attained a status of great distinction in Baghdad under the Nizamiya rule, reached the conclusion that no great change was possible in Muslim society without the social and cultural transformation of Muslims. The decline of the manifest jurisprudence and the inadequacies plaguing it were much clearer to him than to others. In these circumstances he felt the need that in order to release Islam from the stranglehold of the ulema who were stagnant, unchanging and steeped in materialism, the social condition of Muslims must be reformed. According to him, this task could be undertaken only by the adherents of the 'hidden jurisprudence' and no one else. Ghazali totally ignored the reality that the intellectual confusion of the Muslim ummah or its cultural decline was indicative of a deeper crisis which was related to the sources and resources of Muslim thought. The intellectual stagnation of traditional Muslim scholars, their concentration on people's views, the placing of the older jurists in the seat of the clergy – all this became possible at the time when the ulema had snapped their relationship with the Divine Revelation. Rather than recognising this real and vital issue, Ghazali thought it enough that the piety of the mystics would be able to arrest the trend of decline in Muslim society. It was a temporary and a desperate effort. It was futile to expect that such an effort could lead to a renewal of vitality in the intellectual or spiritual world. This is the reason why *Ahya Al-Uloom*, despite all its initiatives, could not lead to the *ahya*, i.e., renewal, but became the manifesto of a new religion.

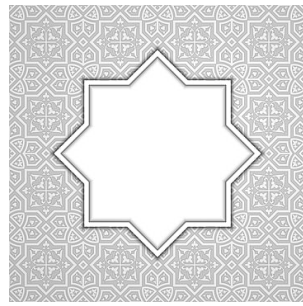
Ghazali was successful, to a modest extent, in defeating philosophy, but committed a serious error of judgment in misunderstanding the implications of the activities of those who, in the garb of mystics, were drawing people to a new religion that was structured around their own inspirations and subjective fancies. One consequence of the occult knowledge gaining respectability as a branch, rather a superior branch, of human knowledge through Ghazali was that the intellectual fancies, psychological aberrations and hallucinations of the common people masqueraded as *ilham* and *mukashafa* and thus gained the status of *nass*. The concept

of the supplementary divine revelation had emerged in the period of Shafei, and as a result of this different and competing schools of thought had come to the fore. But a graver and more alarming situation had emerged as a result of according respectability to subjective inspirations. As far as reports and practices were concerned, at least there were some checks and balances in place in the form of 'refutation and acceptance' (*radd wa qabool*) in the light of history and people's views. But when the subjective inspirations were accorded respectability, there was nothing left to challenge these new additional sources. Those who, frustrated by the stagnant framework of jurisprudence, had felt drawn towards the mystics in the hope of fresh revelations, became captives of people's views represented by the mystics' chronicles (*malfoozat*). The resounding slogan of the 'triumph of love over intellection' raised by the mystics brought fundamental changes in Muslim thinking. The Qur'anic call of rational thinking – فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ – was so completely lost amidst the Sufi quest for love that even a mature thinker like Iqbal could not help but pray – *My Lord! Make me a frenzied devotee of love*. The triumph of love over intellection or of heart over mind was the herald of a fundamental change in Muslim thought that enticed the Muslim mind to the path of renunciation of the world rather than conquering the forces of Nature. The ummah, the claimant to the leadership of the humanity wrote the script of its own decline from the august state of prophethood and was compelled to undertake a self-imposed exile. This new Islam propounded by Ghazali, however, could not become acceptable to the majority of Muslims. Strong repudiation came from the ulema and the common Muslims of this new Islam where the inspirations and dreams of anyone and everyone were given the status of *nass*. In many countries and cities their books were burnt and restrictions were imposed on their publication and distribution.<sup>187</sup> But, in this period of intellectual crisis among Muslims when Muslim thought really required an ideologue who could work to revive the Faith, because of the lack of any other competing version of Islam, the version propounded by Ghazali slowly gained acceptance among the common people. Ghazali who had come to the fore to take the community out of its intellectual crisis and who had shown extraordinary courage in defeating philosophy and whose sincere efforts in the quest of Truth engendered the hope that now Muslim thought would probably go back to its original and genuine sources, belied the expectation of the community. Quite regrettably, rather than releasing the Muslim mind from the specious hair-splitting of the jurists he surrendered it to the misconception of the mystics. From then on till today, all efforts to get out of *Ahya Al-Uloom* seem to have become only an extension of it. Now one has not only to penetrate the layers of covering that have enveloped the Divine

Revelation, but one has also to unmask the divine revelations and inspirations of the mystics which, in fact, pose a greater challenge. Without this, it is not possible to work out any respite or release from this millennium-long crisis in Muslim thought. Unless we are able to accomplish this fundamental task, all efforts at reviving the Faith would merely mean circumscribing the Faith within some cultural parameters. And this is the concept – stagnant and non-evolutionary – that had put the seal, as it were, on the decline of the Ummah.

*SECTION VII*

*Science  
& Civilization*



# Islam and the making of a New Civilization

﴿ وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴾

After a short opening prayer, the Holy Qur'an begins with an invitation to contemplation of the book of nature. The Qur'an assures us of one thing: those with an open and receptive mind studying the book of nature will receive guidance; and the guidance is meant for those that constantly remain God-conscious (*muttaqi*). These pure-hearted ones do not blindly believe in anything without testimony or examining the authenticity of facts. Besides they are equipped with the knowledge and deep awareness of the signs of the universe. Moreover, they believe in the metaphysical facts (of the universe), establish their prayer, and spend from whatever God has granted them (in terms of material assets). These are the ones that are addressed by the Holy Qur'an as the *muflehoon*, the successful ones. However, the claim that the Holy Qur'an is a book of scientific signs is not based on an accurate understanding of the Qur'an's actual function. The purpose of the Holy Qur'an is way beyond getting to know the secrets of the phenomenal world or laws of nature. Its real purpose is to obtain eternal happiness which may not be comprehended accurately without entering the eternal realms of universes beyond limitations. This experience is explained by the Holy Qur'an as a joyful experience through encounter with the Divine. However, our access to (*Ilm ul Kitab*) the knowledge of the phenomenal world or our awareness of the laws of nature can help us understand endless mysteries and secrets related to God, man, and the universe.

The Holy Qur'an is not only the book of dos and don'ts; rather it is a grand key to equipping the human mind with self-confidence and trust in God. When a student of the Holy Qur'an tries to practically understand the following verses:

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مِنْهُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ [45:13]

He (also) subjected for you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth—all by His grace. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect.

[45:13]

Or

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ دَائِبَيْنِ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ [14:33]

He has (also) subjected for you the sun and the moon, both constantly orbiting, and has subjected the day and night for you [14:33].

or

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا [18:7]

We have indeed made whatever is on earth as an adornment for it, in order to test which of them is best in deeds [18:7],

he feels connected to the divine scheme of creation. These are the ones that the Holy Qur'an talks about in the following words:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا

خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُحُبًا فَفَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ [3:191]

(They are) those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (and pray), “Our Lord! You have not created (all of) this without purpose. Glory be to You! Protect us from the torment of the Fire (3:191)

Similarly, the Qur'an exhorts:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ

وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ

الرِّيَاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ [2:164]

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; the alternation of the day and the night; the ships that sail the sea for the benefit of humanity; the rain sent down by Allah from the skies, reviving the earth after its death; the scattering of all kinds of creatures throughout; the shifting of the winds; and the clouds drifting between the heavens and the earth—(in all of this) are surely signs for people of understanding. [2:164]

The exhortation of the Holy Qur'an to contemplate the earth and the skies and whatever may be in between them is actually a means of gaining knowledge of the deepest mysteries related to the creation of the universe. If man engages in deep



observation and keep his heart and mind purified of any biases or doubts, he will discover that the light of the divine revelation will be sufficient for his guidance, even in the absence of the Holy Prophet. It is due to the fact that in the times after the passing away of the final Prophet the signs of God that are found in man and the universe will continue to speak to the pure hearted that start to mirror the divine truth:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيْضٌ  
وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَعَرَايِبُ سُودٌ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ  
يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ [35:27-28]

Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky with which We bring forth fruits of different colours? And in the mountains are streaks of varying shades of white, red, and raven black; just as people, living beings, and cattle are of various colours as well. Of all of Allah's servants, only the knowledgeable (of His might) are (truly) in awe of Him. Allah is indeed Almighty, All-Forgiving [35:27-28].

This invitation for contemplation of God, man, and the universe is accompanied by a rational attitude developed as a result of divine revelation that will be used for guidance in a world where God's messengers would no longer come to guide humanity.

### ADVANCEMENT OF EXPLORATORY KNOWLEDGE

As soon as the Holy Qur'an established a system of contemplating the book of nature, this mode of thinking immediately led the Muslim Mind to research and analysis and appraising the secrets of the laws of nature. So far inductive knowledge had been considered to be equal to the perfection of the human knowledge. The Holy Qur'an gave fundamental importance to experimentation and observation that led to the deductive method of acquiring knowledge. Within the framework of contemplation this was a significant change in itself that soon transformed human civilization. Due to the manner in which the religion of Islam underwent its natural growth, it became imperative for the followers of Muhammad to study and observe the book of nature. From day one, they were aware of the fact that the holy Ka'bah was not only the center of the ritual prayers but also the symbol of the unity among Muslims. Hence, the question as to what should be the correct method of establishing the direction of prayer in various geographical regions and countries became vitally important.

From the beginning, acquiring a profound knowledge of astronomy was fundamentally important for Muslims. In addition, they needed to acquire a vast knowledge of geography and expertise in the art of design and mapping in order to determine the prayer timings in various geographical regions and countries. The Holy Qur'an also provides knowledge regarding the purpose behind the movement of the sun, the moon and the stars. One of these purposes is '...so that you may know the number of years and calculation (of time) [10:5]. In other words, the followers of Muhammad were made the religious heirs to this knowledge and that also implied that they must acquire guidance from the movement of the sun and the moon for establishing the patterns of their own actions. Hence, establishing of the timings for the five daily ritual prayers, determining the direction for the prayer and making a lunar calendar for fasting during the month of Ramadhan were immediate and practical issues that directed the attention of Muslims immediately towards contemplating the ways in which the universe moved.

Establishing a single direction (*qiblah*) for prayer meant that Muslims living in any part of the world must face the holy Ka'bah during their five daily ritual prayers. In the beginning, attempts were made to determine the prayer direction with the help of stars or with the rising of the sun. Some astronomers reached the conclusion based on their in-depth study that various countries must be divided into twelve geographical regions considering the Ka'bah their center.<sup>1</sup> However, their assessments could not be substantiated with certainty.

While Muslims indulged internally in jurisprudential disputes, disagreements on a combined prayer direction became a continual issue among them. Some said that when the Holy Prophet migrated from Makkah to Medina, he offered his prayer facing south. Initially Muslims of Spain and Central Asia followed this practice. Hence, even today rather than getting involved in such wranglings relating to the prayer direction, they say we must also follow the practice of praying in the direction of south while we are in far-flung areas. Others consider this argument opposed to reason on the basis that when in Medina the Holy Prophet offered his prayer facing south, Makkah was actually situated in the south. Hence, this sunnah of the Holy Prophet may not provide sufficient evidence for the establishing of the prayer direction. Others argued that the direction towards which the pilgrimage caravans make their journey for the Hajj must be declared as the prayer direction. Yet others argued that the shape of ancient mosques in those areas could also guide the process of determining the prayer

direction. Yet others strongly recommended that help must be acquired from the findings of experts in astronomy in determining prayer direction. Sometimes the dispute between the conventional and unconventional understanding of the matter resulted in two prayer directions being adopted in a single mosque.<sup>2</sup> The sensitivity of this issue compelled the astronomers to arrive at a definitive solution. The matter remained under constant consideration until the publication of Al-Biruni's *Kitab-e-Tahdid al-Amakin*.<sup>3</sup> In this book, he successfully determined the prayer direction from a city in Afghanistan with the help of Spherical Trigonometry.<sup>4</sup> Based on these principles, setting the prayer direction from any part of the world was no longer a difficult matter.

During the life of the Holy Prophet, Bilal because of his loud, articulate and melodious voice was given the responsibility to call for prayer. However, in the later years, other criteria were taken into consideration for the appointment of a *muezzin* especially in far-flung areas and countries. In this regard, a few of the criteria were that a person appointed for this task must have a correct understanding of the prayer timings; that he must possess the knowledge of various stations of the lunar circle and that he was able to know the exact time even in the darkness of night.<sup>5</sup> Slowly and gradually persons appointed as *muezzin* developed their skills for performing the prayer call until inventions of astronomical instruments were made. They also published books on the science of almanac/calendar and prepared separate astronomical tables of prayer timings for different cities.<sup>6</sup> The need for fixing the direction of the Ka'bah and settling of the prayer timings gave birth to a new science of astronomy called the science of time-keeping.<sup>7</sup> The tables with prayer timings that hang from the walls of the mosques today as a symbol of the past practices have their roots in the science of time-keeping. In the past, when atomic clocks had not been invented, estimation of time was an extremely complicated art<sup>8</sup> where a little carelessness could turn all the accounts schedules upside down. Had the science of astronomy not been a fundamental need and had Muslims not performed this task as their righteous duty, the modern world as it is today may not have been established.

When Al-Khwarizmi wrote his monumental work *Al-Jabr wal Muqabilah*, he too considered it a religious obligation. The applied aspects of the Qur'anic verse relating to inheritance have sometimes given birth to complications that could not be resolved through conventional mathematics.<sup>9</sup> It is reported that the caliph of his time had himself requested Al-Khwarizmi to write a book for resolving the intricacies of the law of inheritance so that this issue may be solved judiciously. In the foreword to this book, Al-Khwarizmi expressed the hope that the geometrical fixing in matters relating

to the distribution of inheritance, measurement of the land, digging of canals and many other similar matters would be made easier through this book, and God would grant him a great reward for this hard work.<sup>10</sup> Al-Battani also expressed the same views in the foreword to his book *Kitab az-Zij as-Sabi*. According to Al-Battani, the science of the celestial universe is the most distinguished among all sciences that nourishes the soul, provides happiness to the heart and life to reason. It also helps develop the ability of contemplation. The vicissitudes of day and night, the changing positions of the sun and the moon and their eclipses and their constant movement within their own orbits are examples to make the human mind conscious of the oneness of God, His greatness, wisdom, grandeur and glory.<sup>11</sup>

After the advent of Islam those that remained in search of establishing a new world of exploration to know the secrets of the phenomenal world were intoxicated by a feeling that they were actually performing a religious duty. A few among them were appointed in religious positions and were known in the society as pious persons. This situation remained unchanged until the end. For example, Ibn Nafees (d.1288), who after analytical evaluation wrote a critical review of *Ibn Sina's Al-Qanoon fi al-Tib* and whose discoveries about the circulation of blood had brought a revolutionary change in the world of medicine, was among the pillars of the Shafe'i school of thought. Similarly, Naseer ud Din Tusi (d.1274) whose Tusi-Couple is considered a milestone with regard to rejection of the Ptolemaic view of the universe was among the great Ismailia scholars in his times.<sup>12</sup> The case of his pupil Qutub ud Din Shirazi (d.1311) was no different as he too had been associated with the observatory of Marragha in Central Asia. Not only did the latter write commentaries on the *Tadhkerah* of Tusi, he also authored some pioneering works on the topic. Besides being engaged in such scholarly activities, Shirazi was also appointed to the post of Qadhi in local courts. He was also author of some famous religious books such as *Jam'ei Usul al-Hadith*, *Sharh-e-Sunnah*, and *Fath al-Mannan fi Tafseer al-Qur'an*.

Nizam-ud Din Nishapuri (d.1328), who was already known for his scientific books namely *Sharh al-Tadhkirah* and *Sharh al-Majasti*, later published *Gharaib-al-Qur'an* and *Raghaib-al Furqan*. Ibn Shatir whose books initiated a discussion in the west about a new system of the universe, was commonly known as the time-keeper (*moaq'geet*) at the great Umayyad mosque in Damascus. A plagiarized version of *Raghaib-al Furqan* made Copernicus known in the west as the founding father of the modern world. Finally, of those that were much talked about for their imaginative thinking and liberal ideas Ibn Rushd (Averroes) was at the top of the list and also held the position of judge in Ishbiliah (now called Sevilla) and Qartabah (now called Cordova). In other words,

from the advent of Islam till the sixteenth century, the movement for gaining the knowledge of the mysteries of nature bore a religious colour and was run by religious people.

### POLITICAL REFORMS OF ABDUL MALIK

During the time of Abdul Malik while the Islamic state existed in the form of the Arab empire, a few events took place that later set a foggy layer of imaginary thinking on our journey of civilization. Abdul Malik was himself a controversial ruler who for a long time had not been able to establish his rule in Hijaz where Ibn Zubair was performing the duties of the caliph. However, later, he received public acceptance in history books.<sup>13</sup> Out of several initiatives, one of the steps Abdul Malik took in order to strengthen his rule was that for the first time he issued orders to convert the tables of his administrative offices and accounts into Arabic.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in the coming years groundwork for establishing an Arab bureaucracy was completed. Another significant event that took place during this period was that the Byzantine ruler Justinian the Second, who was a fierce preacher of the trinity and who could not tolerate the fact that the Muslim state must write *Qul Huwa Allaho Ahad* (Say, there is One God) on the top of its official letterheads, threatened Abdul Malik that if he refused to comply by removing these words, he would get words about the Holy Prophet that would injure the religious feelings of Muslims engraved on the coins.<sup>15</sup> It is said that until Abdul Malik's reign started silver and gold coins had been either struck in the Byzantine mint or as remainders of the Sassanid Empire. They were considered creditable currency due to their seals of verification. Hence, the daily business in that era used to be conducted with the use of these coins. The Byzantine warning immediately convinced Abdul Malik to take necessary steps, and subsequently, the Muslim state established its own mint. For the Arabs, this was quite a novel venture. Khalid bin Yazid who was well-known for his interest in Alchemy,<sup>16</sup> was sent for consultation. Later, effort was spent on creating more expertise in this area. Hence, the above factors paved the way for the translations of relevant scientific books from foreign sources.

Establishment of a mint for a Muslim state was a unique experiment of its own kind. Hence, as a natural corollary of events the mint made arrangements for information gathering and analytical research. At the same time, by having a new Arab model for the tax tribunal, the Arab officials felt the need to arrange for specialized books in the area of civilization and organization of the system of finances and taxes to be translated into Arabic. Hence, with time there was an increase in the need to

translate all the scholarly and expert scientific writings found in the areas conquered by the Arabs. Since the beginning, Muslims had had the attitude that instead of plundering the conquered areas, they preferred to make reforms in their newly adopted administrative systems; additionally, sometimes they would keep local governors and other workers in their positions on the condition that they would remain loyal to them. There was a common feeling that thinking and skills were not the property of one group or nation, rather a common heritage of humanity. Hence, one must not hesitate to accept them. In this context of *الحكمة ضالة المؤمن* (wisdom is a lost treasure of believers), there was sufficient reason and justification for appreciating and adapting translations from foreign original sources. Had our translators merely translated this knowledge, and not made additions of their own with their updated knowledge while ascribing this to Greek masters, undoubtedly as healthy a tradition of learning and the benefits which accrued from these translations would not have been as effectively established as they were.

Books that had been written between five to seven centuries previously with the errors they contained would have been rejected as archaic sources of information. However, the translators who translated Greek books on science and technology certified them as correct and up-to-date works on the subject that adhered to current knowledge. As a consequence, no one could precisely fix when the original publication dates of these outdated books had been, as they began to be considered permanent sources of scientific and technological knowledge. A best example of this kind is the translation of *Al-Majasti* that was completed by Hajjaj bin Matar. The translator not only produced an acceptable translation but he also from his own knowledge added up-to-date and certified information to this book of Ptolemy.<sup>17</sup> Modernization of books on technology played a fundamental role in creating magical impressions about the intellectual greatness of the Greeks. Later when the movement of translations took the form of an intellectual movement in Abbasid Baghdad where every kind of material low and high was selected for translation that also included books on philosophy and astronomy, it became quite difficult for a common reader to separate ideas of practical value from outdated knowledge. The readers found it hard to decide which parts of the accepted knowledge of the Greeks should be acknowledged as correct and which parts must be rejected as misleading.

The truth is that for a long time the Aristotelian system of thought had kept Muslims in an intellectual wilderness. Several centuries passed in the processes of

acceptance and rejection and research and analysis. In due course they were freed from the astronomical and scientific imaginings of the Greeks. Simply put, whatever was achieved during the three hundred years of the late Umayyad and Abbasid eras was not limited to translation, as it is commonly believed in the west, where the argument was for a long time that the foundations of Islamic scientific supremacy was based on translations from Greek books.<sup>18</sup> Hence the transfer of this knowledge to Europe eventually led to the decline of Muslim civilization. To our knowledge, the movement of translation is a chapter in our intellectual history that is characterized by a severe intellectual crisis and a strong sense of directionlessness. In this unique battle to gain control of knowledge it is hard to differentiate between the conqueror and the conquered.

It seems that the Aristotelian system was never accepted in toto. Even during the heyday of translation movement, Muslim scholars published their critique of these translated texts. This resulted into a new genre of scientific material called 'shukuk literature'. For example, Abu Bakr Zakariya Al Razi wrote a book titled *Kitab Al Shukuk ala Jalinus* and Ibn al Haytham wrote *Al Shukuk ala Batalimos*.<sup>19</sup> Another book of this kind is *Al Istadrak ala Batalimos* written by an anonymous Andalusian author.<sup>20</sup> Abu Ubaid Al Jazjani (d.1070) criticized Ptolemy's concept of *Al Falak Al Muaddil Al Maseer* (Equant).<sup>21</sup> In other words, the translated versions of books from India, Greece and Persia were accepted once they had been subjected to research and analysis. Historically, if *kalamist* philosophers such as Abul Barkat Al Baghdadi (d.1023) and Fakharud Din Al Razi (d.1209) criticized Aristotle severely<sup>22</sup> scientists such as Abu Bakar Zakariya Al Razi and Al-Biruni never attached any importance to Aristotle's concept of the creation of the universe and ideology of change and alteration. In the beginning of the twelfth century, Abu Al Fateh Abdur Rahman Al Khazini's book *Kitab Meezan al Hikma* not only fiercely challenged the Aristotelian concept of universe but for the first time presented before the world the idea of the center of the gravitational pull which opened up the doors of scientific discoveries for future generations. However, one troublesome aspect related to such scientific discoveries was that several centuries had passed before the magical effect of the Greek intellectual supremacy died down and the intellectual efforts of Muslim scholars appeared on the scene. The most damaging effect had been caused by the fact that in earlier centuries Muslim scholars had used the books written by Greek authors as references to scientific discussions even though these contained outdated information and backward technological knowledge. Hence, at this stage a credible exploratory movement could not have been introduced according to the Qur'anic worldview.

Therefore, an idealistic inspirational world created by God-loving Muslims, that the revelation of the Holy Qur'an had promised, could not become a reality until later. Ibn al Haytham's critical writings and style in his *Al Majasti* and *Kitab al Mansurat* (Planetary Hypothesis) suggest a vague idea about the processes that Muslims went through to dispel the intellectual hegemony of the Greeks and that they remained in a state of mental incoherence for centuries. He writes:

'He (Ptolemy) either knew of the impossibilities that would result from the conditions that he assumed and established, or he did not know. If he had accepted them without knowing of the resulting impossibilities, then he would be incompetent in his craft, misled in his attempt to imagine it and to devise configurations for it. And he would never be accused of that. But if he had established what he established while he knew the necessary results – which may be the case befitting him – with the reason being that he was obliged to do so for he could not devise a better solution, and (yet) he went ahead and knowingly delved into these contradictions, then he would have erred twice: once by establishing these notions that produce these impossibilities, and the second time by committing an error when he knew that it was an error.... The truth that leaves no room for doubt is that there are correct configurations for the movements of the planets, which exist, are consistent, and entail none of these impossibilities and contradictions. But they are different from the ones that were established by Ptolemy. And Ptolemy could not comprehend them. Nor could his imagination attain their true nature.'<sup>23</sup>

Ibn al Haytham, as well as the first generation of translators, was aware of the errors in Greek astronomy. However, the translation movement had created such furor for the splendor of Greek wisdom that it was not an easy task to nullify these impressions. Secondly, these outdated sources of knowledge were continuously used by the scholarly circles even though a large number of experts in the subject believed that there were better ways of knowing for example the Solar Apogee as laid out in the *Zij al Mumtahan* during the period of Mamun.<sup>24</sup> However, despite all these evident scholarly errors many observers continued to argue that since such claims were made in the books by Ptolemy, Galen or Aristotle they must be based on reality. In other words, a substantial part of the society suffered from an intellectual inferiority complex and this condition was similar to what Emmanuel Kant termed as self-imposed immaturity. It was clear that in the face of outdated translations of *Madinatul Hikmah* (City of Wisdom) the Book of Wisdom that was revealed by God Himself had lost its



luster. This situation clearly caused annoyance for Ibn al Haytham which he expressed in the following words:

The imaginary system of the five planets that Ptolemy had created is false and obsolete. Even he himself was aware of its obsolescence, however, he could not do anything to avoid it. The movement of planets takes place around their orbits and this takes place in the practical world and not in some imaginary world. However, Ptolemy was unable to understand this situation.<sup>25</sup>

As compared to other thinkers of his own times, Ibn al Haytham was much more aware of the fact that Ptolemy's astronomy was established on baseless and non-scholarly foundations and without doing away with it one could not introduce a scholarly and scientific methodology. Abu Ja'far Al Batroji, who was the first among those that fiercely challenged Ptolemy's system, had himself realized how Greek translations had been a hindrance in the eventual growth of a scholarly movement within a pure Qur'anic worldview. According to Batroji, the model that Ptolemy had established was in no way in consonance with observational and sense perception and that whatever he wrote was actually based on superstition rather than reality.<sup>26</sup>

#### LAWS OF NATURE VS. GREEK KNOWLEDGE

Despite continual controversy about the Greek knowledge and the translation movement's ever-increasing popularity, Muslims eventually gained control of all prevailing knowledge two hundred and fifty years after the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. The discoveries made thus far by human civilization in their entirety were brought under the compass of research and analysis. In spite of the scientific splendor and achievements of the Greeks, Islamic wisdom and scholarship continued underground. The Muslim mind of the initial centuries, that clearly had been under the influence of *hikmat-e-balighah*,<sup>27</sup> comprehended the entire universe as a logical and interconnected system. It was deeply conscious of the fact that the movement of the sun and the moon, the rise and the fall of the nations and the endless processes of constant struggles within the universe were all bound by interconnected and well-regulated laws. God Almighty had created a law for the change occurring in everything and each process, the rise and fall and its counts and balances. Hence, it was of the utmost necessity for explorers that they must not only acquire an understanding of the laws of nature but they must also acquire the skills to use them with expert care. These laws of nature and of rise and fall are objective and unchangeable phenomena. The

mysteries of the universe will be revealed to nations that establish harmony among themselves and just as with the secrets of the phenomenal world the laws of governance will also be unraveled to them and the position of political leadership will be safeguarded for their sake. These laws are not reserved for a particular person, nation or era ‘...and never wilt thou find any change in God’s way!’ [33:62].

Muslims were inspired by their strong faith in the laws of nature and by swimming in the ocean of the ultimate wisdom (*hikmat e baligha*) to unveil the mysteries of the universe. Besides passing the knowledge of the Book to his followers, Muhammad, the Holy Prophet had also transmitted wisdom to them: ‘...an apostle from among themselves, who shall convey unto them Thy messages, and impart unto them revelation as well as wisdom...’ [2:129]. In the light of the divine revelation, the Holy Prophet formed a kind of worldview that persuaded man to increase the capacity of his mind as well as ability to deeply observe the universe and conquer it and be inspired by it. *Al Hikmah* is not separated from the Qur’anic revelation. Instead, it was a product of the process of divine enlightenment. In other words, this means that anyone with an unclouded mind and pure heart who studied the book of divine revelation would be blessed with *al-hikmah*. Similarly, a person in receipt of wisdom would cast a glance on the book of the universe, and the profoundest understanding of the hidden mysteries of the universe would be revealed to him/her. This comprehension of the laws of nature (*sunnatullah*) and the realization of matured wisdom were the elements that granted strength of faith and belief to Muslim scholars: ‘The process of knowing or exploring is an unfathomable ocean. Human beings must attempt to unveil all the mysteries of the universe as the potential has been granted to him to unveil the secrets that are beyond this world’.<sup>28</sup>

This attitude based on reason and characterized by the revelation contained in the Qur’an as well as *al-hikmah* (wisdom) gave birth to a new scientific methodology that had its roots in observation and affirmed experience rather than in differentiated suppositions or superstitions in a substantial amount of Greek thought. Instead of relying on ‘thus spoke Plato’ or ‘thus spoke Ptolemy’, a new Muslim Mind introduced an intellectual methodology a glimpse of which can be had in the following excerpt from Abu Raihan Al-Biruni (d.1048):

I have done what every human being must, i.e. they must acquire expertise in their specialized field or accept the scholarly efforts of those that have practised particular sciences. And if they happen to find any shortcomings, they must correct them and whatever new knowledge they can create, they must safely record it for their successors as a memorandum.<sup>29</sup>

This novel scientific empirical methodology<sup>30</sup> of reason and observation, thinking and contemplation introduced to human civilization a new mode of vibrant thinking and practice. It seemed as if the entire book of the universe was opened up for study and a new world of possibilities was longing to be discovered. The belief that the world runs according to mathematical law and that the numerical logic of existing realms was possible was supported by Jabir bin Hayyan who argued that based on numerical value of the qualities of the things it would be possible to establish a rule for the checks and balances for the mathematical finality of the existing phenomena in the world and that this rule would explain the things and the inner harmony between them. Such an order is manifested in all existing things and this alone is the fundamental purpose<sup>31</sup> of the world. Hence, in other words, the fundamental secret of this world of cause and effect was revealed to future generations.

This new scientific method was based on the search for the Truth. Muslim scholars were well aware that the exhortation of the Holy Qur'an for exploration and discovery had placed a great responsibility on their shoulders. According to Ibn al Haytham, the facts were covered with suspicions and doubts:

Hence, the seeker of the Truth is not one who merely reads the books written by the predecessors and who in his good will and natural inclinations tends to be carried away by their discoveries; instead, the seeker of the truth is one who suspects even his own view about them...If he adopts such an attitude, the facts will be revealed to him and he will also perceive and point out eventual shortcomings or suspicions that may have been there in the work of his predecessors.<sup>32</sup>

This new scientific method that was made publicly known in various cities and regions after the revelation of the Holy Qur'an played a key role in an unrestricted analysis of our civilizational journey as well as in organizing human efforts along new lines of discovery.

### **A NEW MIND, NOVEL POSSIBILITIES**

This new scientific methodology founded upon observation and experimentation rather than imagination and estimation later led to the establishment of observatories. For about one thousand years ago, for as long as the tradition of observation and reflection was alive within the Muslim world, new observatories were established in various regions and cities.<sup>33</sup>

Once the searching eyes looked up towards the skies, such questions were bound to arise in the minds: what is this atmosphere? Why are the sky and the horizon of blue color? What is its reality?<sup>34</sup> Why do winds blow? Why do the summer winds mostly blow from the north and the winter winds mostly blow from the south? The answers that Al Kindi provided to such questions were exactly the same as those associated in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with George Hadley and Immanuel Kant.<sup>35</sup> Alnarezi measured the altitude of clouds and vapors and Sahal Alkohl tried to work out the distances for the location of meteors. During the initial centuries, the Muslim world had been joyfully engaged in the movement of conquests and discoveries. In order to convey a correct picture of this situation instead of giving only a cursory explanation it is necessary that we select some of the crucial phases in these explorations and discuss them in detail.

We are informed that the first real observatory of the Muslim world was established on the Qasiyoon mount in the period of al-Mamun in the area surrounding Damascus and the Shummasia observatory in Baghdad. Muslims were the primary beneficiaries of this scientific methodology as it led them to be able to discover the Arch of the Mediterranean or calculate the measurement of the breadth of Equator. Natural philosophers measured the length of a point between Tadmar (Palmyra) and Raqqah with the help of which they discovered that the circumference of the earth at the equator was 40,253 kilometers which proved to be an exceptionally accurate measurement. Soon afterwards tables of astronomical sciences called *Al-Zaij al-Mumtahn* were prepared and attempts were made to produce a map of the world based on firm scientific foundations.

Later, in his famous book *Kitab al-Tahdid al-Amakin*, Al-Biruni discovered yet another method of measuring the circumference of the earth. He wrote that by using an instrument called Mural Quadrant one could make such measurement without having to wander through the deserts. However, the Mural Quadrant is considered to have been invented by Tycho Brahe, hence it is now called Tychonicus.<sup>36</sup> Irrespective of the critique on Al-Biruni, explorers and natural philosophers of the period of al-Mamun needed to measure the boundaries of the world, a task that had at that time no precedence in human history. A cartography for a multi-dimensional world map was needed in which the earth, its oceans, both populated and unpopulated areas, cities and jungles all appeared, together with the planets of the universe.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly, this would be a unique ground-plan. In the twelfth century, other than designing the world map at the request of Sicilian Christian King Roger, Al-Idrisi wrote *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq*

*fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq (Tabula Rogeriana)* that covered almost the entire known world of the time.

The cartography of the world map and the expertise of Muslim explorers in employing this technology greatly dispelled the affect of imaginary stories and mysterious happenings. So far, the writings of Sassanid, Persian and Indian geographers had been tested through individual observation and experiments.<sup>38</sup> On 24 May 997, for the first time, Abul Wafa (d.998) and Abu Raihan al-Biruni succeeded in measuring the longitude between Kath and Baghdad. While al-Biruni waited for the lunar eclipse by the banks of Oxus River, Abul Wafa was busy calculating how he could use the eclipse for measuring the longitude between these two points. Unsurprisingly, the correct measurement of the longitude between these two cities filled these scientists with great joy. For the first time ever the extent of the earth and sky could be conceived by human intellect, though only to the extent that this could be known by observing the movements of the sun and the moon. This discovery shared by Al-Biruni and Abul Wafa almost blew the human mind.<sup>39</sup>

Once again under the leadership of Omer Khayyam the meticulous task of the measurement of the duration of day and night began in the city of Isfahan towards the end of the eleventh century. The searching eyes of Muslim astronomers once again started chasing the movement of objects in the skies. Finally, after his excessive hard work of years, in 1079, Omer Khayyam discovered that there were 365.242198 days in a year which is a number surprisingly close to the calculation in modern research. In this era of electronic instruments and atomic watches, a year is considered to have 365.242190 days. Omer Khayyam, who is known in the west as a poet of his (*ruba'i*) stanzas of four lines, provided irrefutable evidence for the first time that the earth revolves around its own orbit. It is said that Abu Hamid al-Ghazali was one among a group of persons that witnessed Omer Khayyam providing mathematical evidence for the earth's movement with the help of a candle and a globe. (This was the same Abu Hamid al-Ghazali who later came to be known as *Hujjatul Islam*.)

Earlier, we mentioned Ptolemy's hypothetical *Al-Falak Al-Ma'addal lil-Maseer* (Equant). Ibn al Haytham not only fiercely rejected this concept he also presented an acceptable argument for the first time related to the movement of the planets.<sup>40</sup> Ibn al Haytham argued that the idea that a circular object called earth continuously revolves around its orbit without passing through its center may not be accepted. Al-Biruni pointed out that knowledge provided in books such as Ptolemy's famous work had no relation to physics (*ilm-e-haiyat*) or astronomy.<sup>41</sup> This led to distrust in the Ptolemaic system which later persuaded the scholars of astronomy to search for facts and to form

a new universal model. Similarly, in the west, Al-Batroji (d.1200), Averroes (d.1198) and Jabir bin Aflah (d.1200) continuously searched for a new model.

Evidently, Ptolemy's system was losing its credibility in the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> Christian century. However, the scholars of Maragha were destined to formulate an alternative system. Naseer ud Din Tusi (d.1274) made some progress in this regard. He devised an all-encompassing table called '*Zaij al Ilkhani*' founded upon the principles of Trigonometry that helped determine the direction as well as measure the distance of travel towards the skies. By introducing the concept of Tusi-Couple, Tusi liberated future research from the bounds of *Al-Ma'addal Al Maseer* indefinitely. Tusi not only rejected Ptolemy in his book *Tahrir al Majasti* (published in 1247), he also clearly pointed to a new alternative in his second book *Tadhkira* (published 1260). Finally, thanks to the combined efforts of Naseer ud Din Tusi (d.1274), Qutb ud Din Shirazi (d.1311) and Ibn Shatir (d.1375), people's perception of the entire system of the universe changed altogether. In his book *Kitab Nihaiya Al Sul fi Tasheeh al Usul*, Ibn Shatir presented the design of an alternative system based on his credible observations. Consequently, this new model introduced by Ibn Shatir brought about a revolution in human thinking.<sup>42</sup> In the centuries that followed, after partial alteration that could also be called intellectual dishonesty or plagiarism, by way of noisy propaganda Copernicus claimed to be the author of this model. Hence, the world began to consider Copernicus as one of the pioneers of the modern world.<sup>43</sup>

Within no time, the popularization of the Qur'anic worldview changed the whole character of human civilization. All the sciences that had gained credibility centuries ago and that made one believe that the mysteries of the universe could never be solved were no longer trusted. Not only did divination, astrology, soothsaying and other inferior 'sciences' come under suspicion, trusted practices such as alchemy also lost their credibility. Chemistry replaced alchemy. Jabir who is considered the founder and pioneer of this science declared that all the chemical manifestations were subservient to the law of causality. He also argued that it is quite possible for human beings to find out the cause and effect relation between things. According to Jabir, the characteristics of things depend on the proportion of their different elements. Later this balancing formula of Jabir became known as the Law of Proportions. Hence, the principle of balance explained in *Al-Meezan* came to be considered as fundamental to the system of the universe on the basis of which possibilities for the mathematical explanation of the universe were also enhanced.<sup>44</sup> Jabir, who is still known today as the founder of chemistry, declared experimentation as the basis of the science of chemistry. He was the first to prepare acids from minerals such as sulphuric acid, nitric acid, hydrochloric

acid, the latter with the capacity of melting the iron. He also invented alkali as an antidote to acids. In addition, he prepared *aqua regia* from a combination of acids that could dissolve metals such as gold and platinum. These inventions in the science of chemistry later played a key role in preparing artificial fertilizers, plastic commodities, in sum, creating a world of synthetic commodities. It is reported that Jabir strongly advocated mathematical and chemical explanations of the universe and that he even dreamed of creating artificial creatures including humans in order to unveil the mysteries of the universe. Whether or not his thoughts affected research on cloning as it is known in the modern age, one can assess its influence on some of the important western literature.<sup>45</sup>

Up to the ninth Christian century the science of Optics had been influenced by the works of ancient scholars such as Euclid (295 B.C.) and Galen (129-200 B.C.), and it was commonly believed that objects are visible through a process of the eye-sight illuminating things and making them visible. Razi (d.300 hijra) expressed his view that the reality is exactly the opposite of this existing perception. Probably he was the first experimentalist to establish the view that the eye ball contracts and expands by the amount of light that enters the eyes. Ibn al Haytham, who is considered to have been the first to have discovered the laws of refraction and reflection, provided experimental evidence for the discovery that the light that makes things visible does not originate from the eyes, but rather enters the eyes from the exterior world as a result of which an image of an object is formed in the eyes and thus we are able to see it. The principles of Optics not only opened up the real shape of the eye, they also contributed later to discovery of the optical laws that subsequently led to the invention of binoculars.

Al-Biruni was also a contemporary of Ibn al Haytham, he proved that the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. Similarly, Ibn al Haytham informed the world for the first time about the fact that the speed of light is itself limited and so it may not be considered timeless. The future research on Optics depended to a large extent on these fundamental ideas of Ibn al Haytham who, till today, is considered to be the founder of Optics as well as Physics. In the seventh hijra century, Kalam ad Din al-Fasi revealed the secret of the rainbow.<sup>46</sup> He explained that in reality a rainbow is created when the sun beams break once or twice into the drops of water present in the atmosphere. When the sunbeam is broken, the angles disagree with each other and thus create multiple colors. This is the explanation of the rainbow which is believed to have been provided by a French thinker René Descartes of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

Until the first hijra century, like the Greeks and Romans, Muslims too used an alphabetic numeral system. However, since the conventional method of using numbers

became insufficient for a mathematical understanding and interpretation of the universe, Muslims endeavoured to benefit from the Indian numeric system. However, Al Kindi's attempt to promote the system of Indian numbers was too intricate and therefore unpopular. Al Khwarizmi was the first mathematician to start the system of counting large amounts from 0 to 9 and also the possibilities of creating large calculative disbursements with the help of these numbers. Al Khwarizmi's book *Al Jabr wal Muqabilah* brought a revolution in the world of mathematics. It made the process of accounting and calculation relatively easy to understand when it came to matters of inheritance or for measurements of land. Later, Al Khwarizmi's work was considered of great importance in the field of mathematics, particularly in the newly named branch of Algebra; when it first reached Europe, Algebra was called Algorithm (associated with Al Khwarizmi) and has played an important role ever since especially in modern-day computers studies.<sup>47</sup>

Al Khwarizmi's introduction of the Indian numeric system with its use of 0 (zero) certainly made accounting procedures much easier. However, less than a century after his book was written, another book *Kitab al Fasul fil Hisab al Hindi* was composed by Ahmad al Aqladisi (d.980) which invented the system of decimal fractions,<sup>48</sup> though for centuries in the west this invention was believed to have been made by Simon Stevin (1578-1620). In the third century hijra, the science of mathematics became so vast that the use of differential equations and integral calculus became quite common. It is reported that at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century J. Kepler applied them in his law of planetary motion.<sup>49</sup> The mathematics pioneered to the highest levels by Muslims opened up huge possibilities for future investigation. For example, Al Mahani was the first in the history of mathematics to introduce algebraic equations of the third degree which however, unable to solve himself Abu Ja'far Al Khazin managed to solve. In the fifth century hijra, Omer Khayyam invented the principle of third degree equations and solutions, although he regretted being unable to find an absolute numerical solution he lived in the hope that this would one day be possible. It is claimed, however, that in the sixth century hijra. Sharaf ud Din Tusi succeeded in finding the much sought after numerical solution. The search did not end there. Later Yahya Al Maghrebi (d.1283) invented a method to discover the roots of numbers. Around one hundred and fifty years later Ghayas ud Din Jamshed al Kashi (d.1429) shook the world of mathematics by discovering the proportion of radius and circumference of a circle.<sup>50</sup>

This effulgent development of rationality (*aql*) and exploration also saw an intellectual revolution in medicine. In the beginning, the medical sciences of the



Greeks were still held to be authentic. Galen's medical system, originally based on the ideas of Hippocrates, was established on the hypothesis that health is actually created by the proportion and balanced composition of various liquid substances. The four thin substances that, according to Galen's medical terminology, are called humors are supposed to be the reflection of the four elements of air, water, fire and earth. It was a common notion that any imbalances occurring between these elements could cause the human body to fall ill. The Christian world living under the influence of the church was convinced that disease was a form of punishment by God. Against a background of scientific equivocation and religious superstition Muslim scholars and medics attempted to promote experimentation and observation in the field of medicine. It is said that when the plan to construct a central hospital in Baghdad was made, experts in the field carried out experiments by placing pieces of meat in various parts of the city. This way they were able to select a place where the process of decay for the meat was slowest for constructing the hospital. These experiments reveal that during this initial phase when the current books on medicine were still under research and analysis and the field of medicine was still under process of establishment, Muslim doctors had already knowledge about germs, or were at least aware of their harmful effects. However, another aspect of the history of medicine during this period is that sometimes difficulties would arise in convincing the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence (*ahl al fiqh*) about these facts.<sup>51</sup>

In the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Hunain bin Ishaq who was the original translator of Galen had discovered some evident errors in Galen's work. However, he did not dare make more than slight changes. Some of the defects in Galen's anatomy were known to the experts; however, none had the courage to challenge it. Generally, whatever Galen wrote was considered to be true even though it was contrary to observation. Nevertheless, Rhazes (865) was the first person who in his book *Shukuk* challenged Galen's mistaken eminence.<sup>52</sup> Rhazes was the first to have explained the difference between smallpox and measles and wrote a number of books fundamental to this field. In addition, he wrote thirty volumes of books titled *Al Havi* on all the diseases and their cure which all together came to be accepted as a treasure in the field of medicine and had no precedent in the human history. In the fourth century AH, Abul Hassan Al Tabri discovered the causes of itching including particular germs and was the first to reveal them to the world.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Avicenna explained that tuberculosis was a contagious disease.<sup>54</sup> In the same century, Abul Qasim Al Zahravi discovered plethoric diseases.<sup>55</sup> During the sixth century AH Abdul Malik bin Zahar informed the world about pericarditis, the inflammation of the pericardium.<sup>56</sup>

A century and a half after the publication of *Al Havi*, Avicenna published his *Makhzan e Tibbi al Qanoon fil Tib*. For centuries, Avicenna's *Qanoon* guided the experts of both east and west in the field of medicine. For about five hundred years it was known in western institutions of learning as the 'source book'. A younger contemporary of Avicenna, Abul Qasim Al Zahravi (Abulcasis) (d.1013), wrote his thirty-volume *Kitab al Tasreef li man ajaza un al Taleef* which was considered an important source of knowledge on the basis that the author himself was a practitioner in the field of medicine. Twenty-six volumes of this book dealt with the general science of medicine while the last volume was reserved for surgery alone. Since this key work was written in Andalus, it immediately had an impact on the west. Certain complex surgical methods that are generally associated with western surgeons had been described in the book of Al Zahravi. Examples are: measures for the prevention of bleeding from large arteries which are considered to be the work of the French surgeon Ambroise Paré of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century; the Walcher Position in the field of gynecology associated with German doctor Walcher (d.1935); and the Trend Linbergi method for stitching of the wounds wrongly attributed to Friedrich Trendelenburg (d.1924). All these techniques were already known to Al Zahravi.<sup>57</sup>

In the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, some of Avicenna's medical concepts came under attack. Not only did Ibn al-Nafees (b.1213) negate the ancient concepts relating to human pulse, he also produced a new medical textbook to replace *Al Qanoon fil Tib*. In his book *Kitab Sharh Tashreeh al-Qanoon*, Ibn al-Nafees strictly refuted Galen's idea that there was a hole between both parts of the heart that worked as a channel for transportation of the blood. He argued there could be no route from the right side of the heart to the left side other than through the lungs. This new discovery, the so-called 'pulmonary circuit' provided the foundation for the discovery of the circulation of the blood attributed to William Harvey in 1628.

### DAWN OF A NEW CIVILIZATION

The verse from the Holy Qur'an [10:6] 'for, verily, in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and on earth there are messages indeed for people who are conscious of Him!' ended in establishing a culture that was nourished by strong beliefs rather than vain imagination and conjecture. The Holy Qur'an's invitation to observe this formidable universe of God, contemplate its creative signs, gain knowledge of the mysteries of the laws of nature' (*seeru fil ardh* – 'so travel in the land') had engaged the Muslim Mind in such ways that it inspired the thinking behind a lively movement of research and exploration which continued to transform all

fields of life. This new understanding of the universe according to which the world invited thinking men to engage in research and exploration stimulated at every moment the feeling that the process of gaining knowledge about the secrets of the phenomenal world is a joyful but never-ending journey:

یہ کائنات ابھی ناتمام ہے شاید کہ آ رہی ہے دمام صدائے کن فیکوں

The eternal sound of 'kun fa yakun' constantly echoes in the universe.

In the preceding pages, we have tried to show how the change from deductive to inductive methods had challenged and led to the discarding of ideas of earlier scholars. As soon as the Sassanid, Indian, and Greek sciences were repeatedly tested against experimentation and observation, these great pillars of knowledge lost their credibility. Ptolemy or Galen, Aristotle or Euclid, whose unassailable scholarly reputes had for centuries hindered the path of the search for the truth, could not stand before this new scientific methodology. A general interest for observation was constantly growing until the Qur'anic exhortation of *seeru fil ardhi* 'so travel in the land' spurred the daring and determined to engage with this world created by God Almighty and see with their own eyes. In this regard, the travelers Ibn Jubair (d.1217) and Ibn Batuta (d.1377) are still recognized today as prominent contributors to this change. It is reported that in 1325, the twenty-one-year-old young Ibn Battuta set out to make pilgrimage to Makkah. He returned home twenty-four years later after traveling to the Arab world, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, India, Russia, Africa, China and Sumatra. The travelogues of Ibn Jubair and Ibn Battuta presented a first-hand account of the world of manifestations. Similarly, it was the first time ever that a true account of anyone's personal experiences about various nations and civilizations was written down. Abul Fada (d.1331) revealed the idea that in the world of travels when a traveler moves from one direction to another, he/she either feels as if the days have become longer or that time has suddenly stopped. Yaqut al Hamwi (d.1229) wrote *Ma'jam al Buldan* where he provided an elaborate account of what life is like in the most famous cities of the world and what kind of people live there.

The experimental knowledge of the world's natural philosophers and scientists, a zest for travelling, and publication of significant scholarly works were each founded upon a general inclination towards gaining and benefiting from knowledge that existed within the vast boundaries of the Muslim world. That included a considerable part of the civilized world and this acted as a laboratory of the human civilization where sciences from various regions of the world and knowledge of various cultures were concentrated. For example, the agricultural techniques of Andalusia where several crops were grown each year taught the farmers of Iraq to grow more

than one crop. The people of Iraq and Syria benefited from the conventional technique of irrigation through canals and transporting water from the lower parts of the land to higher parts, a practice that the people of Iran had originally followed. Fruits of various kinds were introduced from one area to another. In this way, an effective agricultural revolution brought joy and prosperity to the Muslim world. This atmosphere of general prosperity that was already felt in the eighth century created a suitable environment for explorers. Within this leisured environment, inventions that astonished the intellect were presented; however, in reality the idea that worked behind these inventions was the aim to make the world realize that even a basic understanding of the universal laws could make the establishment of a newer, more magical world possible.

Banu Musa who in history books is known as an expert machine-maker is reported to have created a world of automatic toys such as multicolored fountains that changed colors automatically, automatic flutes and even a small robotic girl that could prepare and present tea to the guests.<sup>58</sup> In the eleventh century CE, in the Spanish city of Toledo, Arzachel invented a form of water clock that not only told time but also gave information about the movement of the moon. It is reported that for centuries this clock was displayed in Toledo's museums. An expert disassembled it to find out more about its secret and could not put it back together again.<sup>59</sup>

This world of exploration and discovery created by the divine revelation in the shape of the Holy Qur'an instilled confidence in the common-mind which could be witnessed in the form of scholarly and experimental activities that continued to be undertaken in various cities and regions for centuries. According to a common understanding, knowledge about the natural laws could make the impossible possible in this universe of God that had been primarily created for human beings. Already conquests had been made and life discovered on both land and sea. However, it has been claimed that Abbas bin Farnas, in the ninth-century city of Cordova, made the first successful flight in history. It is reported that one day he jumped from a tall minaret of the Cordova mosque wearing a kind of parachute dress. Encouraged by this experiment, on another occasion he made a wooden frame in the shape of an eagle. At the appointed time, a huge crowd gathered to witness the spectacle as he took flight from the height of the minaret and circled in the air for about 10 minutes before his aircraft fell to the ground. Having injured his back this seventy-year-old man never had another chance to repeat this experiment again.<sup>60</sup>

Not only did the general acclamation of the great epoch of discovery and exploration influence Muslim minds, non-Muslim scholars and thinkers also joined this movement.<sup>61</sup> In the initial centuries, when Muslim rule was expanding in various

regions, the number of Muslims was still limited. However, their innovatory ideas engaged the entire society of the age at both intellectual and scholarly levels. Anyone might participate in this movement beyond distinctions of color and race, language, religion and nationality, though it was primarily faithful Muslims that led the great movement. At that time the followers of Muhammad had the conviction that in the absence of prophets they were given the responsibility to lead the nations of the world (*shuhadaa 'ala an-naas*) [2:143] and this was why as a nation unveiling the secret of the universe and its strategic management was part of their agenda. Despite the evidence which has been presented of this age of exploration which lasted for nearly one thousand years and brightened the Europe of the so-called 'dark Ages' and laid the foundations of the modern scientific civilization, there are still people who persist in arguing that Islam allows no possibilities for the growth of science. Such people are steeped in prejudices and are quite mistaken in their views.<sup>62</sup>

In the preceding pages, we have explained in detail that throughout all the past eras in which the Muslim world held the reins of discovery and exploration it was those that had the deeper understanding of the divine revelation who were at the forefront. Most of them wrote some pioneering books on Islamic understanding such as exegesis and interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy, etc. Forewords to several books considered milestones in the sciences of discovery and which brought intellectual revolution to our civilization, testify that the respective authors wrote these books for purely religious purposes and for which they expected the reward from God alone. Had Muslims not considered such work their religious duty during the processes related to the dissemination of knowledge they would not have been able to gain public support. Without this, an exemplary institution such as *Bait al Hikmah* would not have been established in Abbasid Baghdad nor would observatories and laboratories have been established during various phases of this history. In that sad era of theological equivocation when due to internecine conflicts related to the Kalamist Fiqh one religious school of thought considered eliminating another school of thought equally lawful and justifiable, one finds no example of opposition among the public to the scientific advancement in the form of observatories and laboratories. In truth, these scholarly and research activities would have been used by the rulers for their political interests a clear example of which is the establishment of *Bait al Hikmah*, or 'House of Wisdom' – a library and translation institute in the Abbasid Baghdad.

Our historians have given exceptional importance to *Bait al Hikmah*. One reason behind this may be that just as intellectual endeavors undertaken by the Umayyad

mosque of Damascus were marginalized with the decline of Banu Umayyad, the rule of the pioneers of *Bait al Hikmah* continued for about five hundred years which, naturally, had an impact on history writing. After the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, a general wave of movements of experiment and discovery resulted in the establishment of networks of observatories, libraries and scholarly gatherings in various cities and regions. One could hardly find a city in the Muslim world where there was no talk about a group of scholarly intellectuals of high caliber. Being able to draw on a large number of such skilled persons, Yaqt al Hamwi (1179-1229 CE) took the initiative of putting together various biographical dictionaries such as *Ma'jam al Udaba*, *Ma'jam al Shu'ara* and *Akhbar al Shu'ara*. Attempts were made to gather all the scientific resources produced during that era and to place them in the first organized library established by the Umayyad rulers in Damascus. Medicine, alchemy, and manuscripts on various subjects in multiple foreign languages were made accessible for all without any distinction. Later when the Fatimids founded a new caliphate in Egypt, in their agenda they showed special preference for establishing libraries. It is reported that during the period of Fatimid Caliph Al 'Aziz, forty rooms were reserved for books relating to ancient knowledge.<sup>63</sup> In 1234, when Mustansariyya Madrassah was established in Baghdad, the caliph donated 80,000 books to the *madrassah* from his personal library. This shows how books in that era were considered to be an important part of people's lives. Similarly, mosques were considered to have key importance in the social life and were considered incomplete without libraries attached to them. In these libraries scholarly discussions related to various subjects of life were constantly held. One must not mistake the above details for establishment of large libraries in solely large cities such as Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo. One such library is reported to have been established in the city of Shiraz in the tenth century CE that had 360 rooms and was surrounded by canals and lush gardens.<sup>64</sup> During the thirteenth century CE, according to Yaqt al Hamawi, a Syrian biographer and geographer), there were ten great libraries in the city of Marv alone. Also during that era Baghdad, considered a city of madrasahs, had thirty separate madrasahs each with its own library.<sup>65</sup> When Al Qazi al Fazil established a madrasah in thirteenth century Egypt, he donated 100,000 books to the madrasah from his personal collection.<sup>66</sup> If that situation is compared to others in existing libraries of that era in other regions, one can understand the importance of the culture of libraries. In the fourteen century, there were around two thousand books in the library of the famous Sobonne University of Paris while in the fifteenth century the central library of Vatican housed 2257 books in total.<sup>67</sup>

Production of paper played an important role in this period owing to the fact that in Muslim societies, besides in mosques, libraries had gained central importance in the wider social life where the general environment favored teaching and learning. This was in contrast to the early years of Muslim society, when the use of papyrus was quite common but limited the availability of books to elite circles of men. In the middle of the eighth century, the first paper factory was established in Baghdad.<sup>68</sup> Soon, this industry flourished so much that the bazaars of Baghdad were filled with paper-sellers and items of stationary.<sup>69</sup> In Baghdad an entire bazaar, *Suq al Warraqin*, was created for book-related items and stationary. This easy availability of paper was a sign that the world of science and technology which so far had been limited to special circles was now open and accessible to the general public.

### SUMMARY

The public euphoria created by the Qur'anic invitation to gain knowledge of the secrets of the phenomenal world became a part of the Muslim society at both intellectual and social levels that were seldom influenced by political revolutions. Despite the fact that caliphates were plundered and rulers deposed intellectual and scholarly growth in society remained unobstructed. The political journey of the righteous caliphate suffered from a journey backward which led to the dispersion of caliphates to Abbasid Baghdad, Fatimid Egypt and Umayyad Spain. However, the Muslim Mind continued to be engaged in the investigation, critique and unveiling of the mysteries of the universe as by then the Muslim civilization had learned the secret of living amidst adverse circumstances. When Baghdad suffered from decline, the city of Cordova flourished and when the Umayyads started to lose power in Spain, many other cities such as Damascus, Istanbul, Tashkent, Samarqand, Bukhara, Kabul, Cairo, and Delhi became symbols of the success stories of Muslim civilization.

The invitation of the Holy Qur'an to ponder and contemplate eventually delivered its results in the form of the unveiling of the mysteries of the universe. In the beginning, Muslims attempted to benefit fully from the Sassanid, Greek and Indian sources of human wisdom. However, by the time they realized that these ancient sources were limited in terms of correlating with the facts, they decided themselves to undertake the journey of observation and experimentation. Consequently, a scholarly hypothesis that could not be confirmed by experiments and observation was considered untrustworthy. The Ptolemaic system and the Greek wisdom trusted by Christians but which for centuries had been obstructing the advancement of human thinking were finally rejected after great effort and much research and investigation. The foundation

of modern science was laid on the day Ibn al Haytham raised objection to the truth of the Ptolemaic system. Later when the astronomers in the observatories of Maragha declared observation the foundation of knowledge of the universe and as a result Ibn Shatir wrote his book *Kitab Nihayat al Sul fi Tanqih al Usul*, the scholars working in this field felt vindicated for having established firm foundations for future search for knowledge. About a hundred and fifty years later this achievement was picked up by Copernicus in Europe and later research constructed a new world upon this foundation. Owing partly to their prejudices and partly to ignorance, the west remained negligent of the fact that the Muslim unveiling of the mysteries of the universe had been stimulated by the Qur'anic worldview that declares contemplation of the universe a religious obligation.

The Greek conception of science was quite limited and translations of Aristotle's books temporarily misled the Muslim scholars. Natural Philosophy, which comprehended what was sometimes called physics, metaphysics or even mathematics, covered all the sciences.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in the Aristotelian conception of the universe, the world was accepted as an eternal reality, whereas the belief that the universe was as old as God Himself was contrary to the Qur'anic worldview. Initially, Muslim thinkers found it quite difficult either to partially agree with or to wholly reject such ideas. However, once the intellectual and scientific foundations for studying and theorizing the universe became stronger, not only did Greek ideas about the universe lose their credibility, the conventional Greek classification of the sciences was also considered insufficient for the processes of research and discovery.

For example, when Ibn al Haytham wrote *Kitab al Manazir* or Al-Biruni wrote *Tahdid Nihayat al Amakin* they were aware of the fact that they were laying new branches for the sciences. If one glances through the publications of that era, one is surprised by the fact that within a short time specialized books were being written on subjects that thus far had been considered to contain great wisdom but in reality had received little attention. Hence, one finds examples in that era of Muslim authors writing books such as *Kitab 'Ilm ul Hindasah* and *Kitab Al Jabr wal Muqabilah* and *Kitab al Nujum*. Undoubtedly, some Muslim scholars were strongly inspired by Aristotle.<sup>71</sup> However, it was the Qur'anic concept of the universe and the religious zeal and passion for research that came to command these activities and the general atmosphere in Muslim societies. Similarly, in the context of Mamun's dream<sup>72</sup> of Aristotle, it would not be difficult to comprehend how in earlier times Greek sciences and wisdom were considered to agree with Muslim thought.

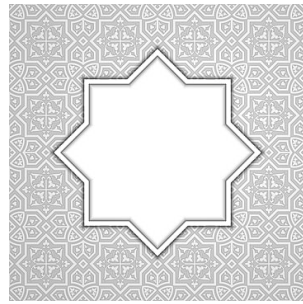


A few thinkers of the present age have mistaken modern science as purely an invention of the west.<sup>73</sup> They seem surprised that despite being scholarly and intellectually advanced the Muslim world failed to create modern science in the Middle Ages. They claim that by default Islam as a religion does not allow observation and invention. Such false assumptions and criticisms are not new or strange to Muslims especially during the centuries of their decline. First, these critics do not seem to remember that the books written by the ancient Greek scholars were radically revised and updated before their translation from Arabic into Latin. Secondly, there were not only revised and updated Greek texts, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries when Arabic books were being translated into Latin, Muslims had produced their own original contribution in various branches of natural sciences what is generally dubbed as 'studia arabum' or sciences of the Arabs. Without these translations the west would not have been able so easily to establish the so-called 'modern' science. Thirdly, if books written by the ancient Greeks were the main source of a scientific revolution, why did these books not create a revolution when they were discovered and read in their original form in the Roman Empire? Fourthly, why was it that knowledge originating from Sassanid, Roman, and Indian sources did not bear fruits in the west during the Middle Ages? The facts are that once this human heritage was brought into the realm of research and analysis in the light of the Qur'anic worldview, then the grounds was paved for a scientific revolution. Fifthly, Muslims consistently attempted to evaluate the equivocations of the Greek wisdom in the light of divine revelation and through their own experience and observation. In the process, they also became victims of equivocation and sometimes it felt as if the Qur'anic worldview clashed with basic human wisdom. However, in due course, with the assistance of the divine revelation their efforts in seeking out the laws of nature were rewarded. In the western Middle Ages while thinkers and philosophers were faced with the narrow-mindedness of the church and the human mind had fallen prey to equivocations and hypotheses that it had itself created, and while no one could see the way out of this suffocating situation, Latin translations of the Arabic books proved to be the beacon of light for the western scholars. In other words, one can claim that all the manifestations of knowledge and the skills that we find today not only in the west but also throughout the world have their foundations in the Qur'anic worldview that declared contemplation of the universe as a religious obligation. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an taught its followers to benefit from all existing as well as past sources of knowledge.



*SECTION VIII*

*Muslim Women*



# What is Islamic about the Islamic Veil?

It is a common misunderstanding that in the revolutionary struggle of Islam Muslim women had no fundamental role. At most what they could do was to encourage their crusading or warrior husband or not to complain about the consequences and the hazards that accompany any revolutionary struggle. In every condition and status whether wife, daughter or mother, women should maintain a positive disposition and intent toward the struggles that engage men. As far as personal participation in the revolutionary struggle is concerned, outperforming men in religious fervor is an idea that strikes women quite rarely. What the declined Muslim society has conveyed to her is that as a wife she is supposed to be under the complete control of her husband. She does not need to exercise her own mind to distinguish between right and wrong, because it is the responsibility of her husband. For her the only essential duty is to bow her head before her husband in complete obedience. The opinion of her husband is supposed to be hers too and she is to exist for the rest of her life with no individual identity of her own.

As far as using her energy for the dominance of Islam, when did the Muslim society prepare a traditional woman for such a cause? She would not even dare to articulate her opinion about issues related to domestic affairs let alone have a deep insight about the changes taking place in the world. One of the greatest reasons for our decline is the fact that over time we gave so much importance to local customs, concepts, norms and traditions that the real spirit of Islam got buried under them. In most Muslim societies, the conception or roles that have been assigned to Muslim women, have become more embedded in local custom and traditions than Islam, though we have evolved them to the status of sacraments! Whereas the fact is that the woman of Prophetic era is quite different from the traditional religious woman of our times. Those who desire Islam to be dominant again have to ensure that to make the holistic struggle of Islam a success, they have to borrow and exercise the whole strength of Muslim society. Muslim men need to rise above the local traditions without

any inhibitions so as to allow the women to play the role that Islam demands from them. The history of first generation of Muslim bears testimony to this fact.

In a society where Islamic teachings have been amalgamated with local traditions and culture in such a manner, for ordinary Muslims it has become difficult to distinguish between them. In such an environment, where due to fear of mischief and trouble, doors have been slammed that Islam has kept open, the entire ummah is in a state of acute psychological paralysis. In reaction its ulema and theologians instead of demanding fresh implementation of shariah are spearheading movements for its protection. In such bleak times, to reach out to the pristine message of Islam and include woman within the revolutionary struggle is exceedingly difficult if not impossible. People have become acculturated to being political slaves for so long, they think only in terms of protection and live in a world of demands. To expect sacrifice from them in order to achieve the dominance of Islam over the world and to make their women companions in this struggle, will require a prolonged and dedicated effort. Nothing less than an ideological revolution will suffice, but this cannot even be begun until Muslim society has revived the fundamentals of Qur'an and sunnah. The ineffectual ideas and concepts that have gained common currency over a long period of colonial dominance need to be shunned. Muslim woman must have the rights that Allah and Prophet Muhammad have bestowed upon her, and demand nothing outside the ambit of what is meant for her according to injunctions of Allah and Prophet. "What Prophet gives you take it, and from what he prohibits, refrain."

In order to carry out the divine ordinances it is indispensable for Muslim women to fight with valor against every local obstacle and cultural barrier. For Muslim women what alone holds value is the guidance Qur'an has set out for them and how it was carried out by the women companions of the Prophet. The basic source of guidance is the Qur'an and after that all those hadith that corroborate the fundamental guidelines of the Qur'an. The views of jurists who out of caution and as a remedy to curb the decline of Muslim society, judged it essential to shun woman and relieve her of certain responsibilities, barring her entry from mosques, should be dismissed as personal interpretation. Such thinking may have been relevant for a specific environment and time, but it is not guaranteed immortality. Any qualified jurist or theologian may adjudicate on a specific era; but the guidance they formulate is limited by a finite understanding of religion. To continue to take this understanding as relevant and authentic for future and changed circumstances is not acceptable or expedient. For us what is relevant is what has been expounded in the Holy Qur'an and how Prophetic sunnah has corroborated it and that is all. As far as the juristic and theological views of

qualified scholars of different eras are concerned, the corpus of literature they produced is our treasure from which we can benefit. But their ordinances, verdicts or decrees are not to be implemented for all time to come. When the Book of Allah is present among us it is not worthy that we look at any other source for our guidance. To carry the conversation further it is essential to understand that Islam considers the faith of a believer, man and woman alike, as an individual choice i.e. like a Muslim man, Muslim woman too testifies to her relation with Allah and his Prophet Muhammad, further declaring that she is ready for any sacrifice in this path. Thus the faith of a Muslim woman is her own individual act. Her act of faith has no relation to her husband, brother or father. She is individually responsible for her actions, receiving reward or punishment on her own account. The good deeds of men are not enough for her salvation. In the Islamic movement the personality of a woman is not marginalized but like a man she has a fundamental role to play. Qur'an in unequivocal terms states that the movement of Islam will not be possible without the participation of women. It is essential that Muslim society in its entirety should take on the infidels. It must be understood that men and women are not from different planets but are similar parts of a grand movement and sympathetic friends and consolers of one another. Qur'an rightly points out, "the believers, men and women are protectors, one of another; they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil; they observe regular prayers, pay zakat and obey Allah and his messenger. On them will Allah pour his mercy for Allah is exalted in power, wise. Allah has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting stay, but the greatest bliss is the Good pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme triumph" [9:71-72].

Thus in the light of the Qur'an, the men and women striving together for the religion of Allah are part of such a sacred mission, whose outcome makes them joint heirs of His mercy. For the dominance of Islam for which faithful men and women strive individually, the role required of women is in no way less in stature than that of men. In the earliest period of Islam, there was hardly a battle in which Muslim women according to their capability and capacity did not prove less cooperative and helpful than men. This cooperation sometimes took the form of monetary help, at other times poetry and eulogy, and on various occasions physical assembly and exhortation. In the historical texts the wives of Prophet Muhammad and other women companions are commonly depicted as providing food and water for soldiers, and nursing their injuries. However, women's direct participation in battle has either been forgotten or excluded by our historians and the reasons for this will be discussed later on.

Our primary intention is to elaborate the fact that in an Islamic movement, woman too has a basic role. Just as the faith of a husband is not enough for his wife or the prayer and piety of a brother cannot be a source of salvation for the sister, similarly, the reward for participation in the Islamic movement is received individually by every woman. To be considered a part of the movement for dominance of Islam the individual's participation, regardless of their gender, becomes indispensable. "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: you are members one of another; those who have left their homes and were driven out therefrom, and suffered harm in my cause, and fought and were slain – Verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into gardens with rivers flowing beneath: A reward from Allah and from Allah is the best of rewards" [3:195].

In the path of Allah, leaving one's homeland, being humiliated, fighting and being martyred is not confined to men only but their trials, tribulations and struggles have been joined to women too; that is why before Allah the status of a believer is equivalent to the amount of struggle he/she has expended. Men and women are both equal claimants of reward and it is desired from both that they choose the path of Allah and be heirs of great blessings and rewards. "Whoever works righteousness, man or woman and has faith, verily to him we will give a life that is good and pure and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions" [16:97].

Categorical guidance comes from the Qur'an that in the path of Allah a woman like a man has to leave hearth and home, become a victim of enemy oppression and must be always ready to kill and be killed. So how is it possible that a woman without participating in and choosing this path will become a contender for salvation in the afterlife? How can the present-day Islamic movements persuade the believing women to give up their role and participation in this revolutionary Islamic movement that render them eligible for the beautiful rewards promised by Allah? If they do so it is in explicit denial of Qur'anic injunctions that specifically state that salvation will not depend on sectarian, racial or gender grounds but on the individual's acts and conduct. "Everyone of them will come to him singly on the day of Judgment" [19:95]. Is it not essential that a conscious Muslim woman should prepare for that day from now about Judgment day which is described as "And from his mother and his father, and from his wife and children. Each one of them, that day will have enough (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others" [80:35-37].

Just ponder! On one hand Qur'an emphasizes that for salvation, individual actions are essential, for the trials experienced in the path of Allah the immortal rewards of success are guaranteed. In this context no distinction has been made between a man



and woman. But on the other hand if we look at Muslim societies today, we are shocked to find that in many, whether be they man or woman, scholar or illiterate, liberal or conservative, every person believes that in the struggle for peace and justice woman has no key role to play. There is a common perception that in destroying the contemporary deceitful and deceptive system woman has no role or responsibility. Her sphere of influence has just been confined to the four walls of the home; she has nothing to do with the outside world. Slowly and steadily in recent centuries this concept has gained much ground and such that no new thinking or pondering is done over the issue. Times may have changed but the conditions of the ummah remain abysmal and pathetic. In our minds and hearts, we may have a strong desire to witness Islam becoming dominant once again, but the traditions have such a strong overwhelming impact that our desire to revive our declined Muslim society on the basis of Islamic fundamentals is stifled even before it takes any pragmatic shape. Thus the result is that our society is protective of every symbol of our decline. It is fearful that the winds of western cultural aggression that create havoc in the ruined encampments may soon destroy the very foundations of Muslim society. The reactive implementation of protective cover is so strong that our traditional scholars have deprived women of even those rights that Islam has already bestowed on them. If one looks at our traditional books they have chapters with titles like: "The orders for prohibition of women entering mosques" whereas there is an explicit order of Prophet Muhammad that states: "Do not exclude women from mosques."

In our opinion, to stop western cultural aggression and its lax morality gaining hold, artificial methodology is ineffective and the traditional thought of the Muslim world on its own fundamental basis lacks sufficient vibrancy to arrest the onslaught. It is precisely because of these facts that, despite the criticism of ulama and their emphasis on safeguarding our traditional norms, society is disintegrating with each passing day. One can prepare a list of dictates to keep Muslim women confined to the home, but the factual reality is that slowly but determinedly the ordinary woman is seeking to discover her role in the world. Just point out the spheres of life where Muslim women are not present! We cannot avoid the fact that while discovering her role in the world, a Muslim woman is far more inclined towards a western role model than an Islamic one. Many a times her traditional relationship with Muslim society if it has not actually snapped has appreciably weakened. Despite the ulama expending considerably effort on trying to protect the culture and traditional norms, in the name of sharia legitimizing them with divine sanctity in the vain hope of maintaining a

precarious status quo, Muslim society continues to crumble. Such efforts do not have the strength to withstand the inexorable winds of change.

In the last seventy years of helpless, political slavery none of the self-styled cultural institutions have remained intact. You tried to confine woman to their homes but they came out; you put up vehement opposition against female education, but their presence in modern educational institutions has become yearly more evident. You barred them from socio-political institutions but a significant proportion of Muslim women became members of the same and you were unable to effectively oppose them. You did not consider it praiseworthy that your own daughter should study in a co-educational medical institute, but when you needed to have one, you thought it better to consult a Muslim woman doctor. Similarly, on one hand you consider the profession of a lawyer haram for a woman but for 'protection' of shariah when the public meeting of the Muslim Law Board is organized, participation of veteran Muslim women lawyers is considered inevitable. There was a clear contradiction in what you preached and what you practiced. Had the ummah listened to your 'Islamic advice' today there would have been no female Muslim lawyer to defend the sharia in courts nor any female Muslim doctor to attend to the believing women of the ummah.

If you are really serious and selfless in your desire to stop the cultural aggression, then do not use the traditional tools. When you have the revolutionary power of Islam that can defeat any civilization and any cultural aggression, why are you so adamant on fighting a defensive battle? If your Islam cannot stand the artificial winds of the West and the illusionary thunder of East, or your women feel more at home in the western system than the Islamic, and your aggrieved daughters resort to 'unlawful' courts of justice instead of shariah courts, then it must be acknowledged that you are not the inheritors of that Islam that granted women so many rights that the companions of the Prophet thought that after the advent of Islam, women had become so independent that they no longer needed to be under the protection of men. Then, the individual freedom of woman and the protection of her rights had set such an example that to be successful in both this world and afterlife being a woman was no obstacle. The need of the hour is that every individual should be motivated to take up a role in the Islamic movement, as foretold by both Allah and his Prophet. Otherwise, in simply describing the traditional norms as Islamic you are neither doing any service to Islam nor is it possible for you to stop the encroachment of the West.

When it comes to the contemporary movements appealing to a revived Muslim consciousness or retrograde Muslim societies, both lack the realistic approach when it comes to the role of women. Among those who are desirous of change vis-à-vis Islam,

even for them the Islamic role of woman has been buried under the traditional one. How is it that we have forgotten the existence of an ummah in which women ulama were present in good numbers, where women were exalted as preachers and teachers? The imams of their times benefitted from and were privileged to attend their lessons, as it was a norm to seek advice from women in policy matters. The women had been the supply chain and support group during battles. In every important socio-political programme, whether the Prophet Muhammad's last sermon or any revolutionary meeting or congregation in the Prophet's mosque in Medina, Friday or Eid congregational prayers, women were omnipresent. But among the present generation ignorance or purpose neglect of such an ummah is prevalent. Even in the imagination of our religious sisters the conception is lacking that to extract today's Muslim ummah from the morass and to make the caliphate once again a reality, the responsibility lies not only on men but on them too. In the struggle for dominance of Islam, faithful women once again have to be comrades in arms with men. To initiate a holistic revolutionary struggle, it is essential to clear the smokescreen about women that is prevalent in traditional circles and which has now evolved to the stature of sacred beliefs.

### **WOMEN AND HER DOMAIN OF WORK**

A fundamental misconception is about the supposed legitimate domain for woman activities. It is a commonly held belief that her domain is confined to the four walls of house, anything beyond that is the world of man. If a woman interferes in this sphere she does not remain a woman. Before we analyze this hypothesis and witness what Qur'an has to say about it one fundamental issue needs to be deliberated. First it needs to be understood the God has created man and woman biologically different. The duty of procreation and giving birth is the province of woman and no one can take it over. It is such a big responsibility the implications of which are evident, and they certainly render her exempt from other responsibilities. She has been kept free from earning a living, and during monthly periods prayers have been kept to a minimum; even for jihad her participation is voluntary and the Prophet stated: "The jihad of women is performing hajj." In reality the burden of procreation and formation of progeny is such a big responsibility that justice demands that no further imposition would have been placed on her.

Nonetheless, although procreation is the basic responsibility and duty of a woman and it is her essential role, it is not the sum and substance of her life. As the basic role of a farmer is to produce grain, a teacher's basic work is to teach and a doctor's

function is to treat patients, in a similar manner the basic role of a woman is the procreation of the next generation. However, a farmer, teacher or doctor besides working in their primary roles each has further jobs to perform and different identities to assume in society. Similarly, the role of a woman in Islamic society does not end at procreation – she is a dynamic entity. While the Islamic movement is confronted with risks it is as much a responsibility of women as that of men to find new ways and take on new roles. When enemy forces are continually attacking Muslim borders or when the united strength of Muslims is scattered no technocrat or doctor or any professional can turn a blind eye to these events, citing the fact that the role is not a part of his basic responsibility, remuneration and profession. He cannot dismiss involvement in the Muslim movement as just an exceptional task during an emergency. As part of a normal routine Islam too expects from every believer that besides his professional life he is a caller, inviter to his religion. It is true that the four walls of a home are the basic field of activity for a woman, the procreation of generations is her basic responsibility because nature has bestowed on her the ability of being a mother. But if anyone insists that after fulfilling her basic responsibility her role in society is over, this only depicts his ignorance about Islam. He is negating the great culture and civilization that was established during the Prophetic era by both men and women.

Now let us see how the book of Allah determines the sphere of work for a woman. Those who believe in confining the women to just four walls of the house cite this verse of surah Ahzab. Before we comment on the verse we want you to understand the verse in its complete context:

“O Prophet! Say to your consorts. If you desire the life of this world and its glitter, then come! I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. But if you seek Allah and his messenger and the home of the hereafter, verily Allah has prepared for the well doers amongst you a great reward. O consorts of the Prophet if any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the punishment would be doubled to her and that is easy for Allah. But any of you that is devout in the service of Allah and his messenger and works righteousness to her shall we grant her reward twice and we have prepared for her a generous sustenance.

O consorts of the Prophet! You are not like any of the [other] women. If you do fear [Allah] be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire; but speak you a speech [that is] just. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like of the former times of ignorance; and establish regular prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and his messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove abomination from you, you

members of the family and to make you pure and spotless. And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the signs of Allah and his wisdom; For Allah is all subtle all aware”[33:28-34].

Any vigilant reader of Qur’an and any person having acquaintance with Arabic literature can easily understand that in these verses with chronology and continuity the Prophet’s wives have been addressed. They are being sensitized to the great burden they have incurred by being the wives of Prophet. At the beginning of this surah they have been declared as the mothers of believers. So as compared to common women why not expect to find exemplary character and great pious deeds from such exalted women? So they are time and again sensitized about the fact that they are unlike other common women. For them the yardstick of pious life is different from others, i.e. this explains why their mistakes will receive double punishment and their good deeds double rewards. To be a wife of the Prophet is an honour no other woman can enjoy. In comparison with common women much more restrictions are imposed on the wives of Prophet, the reason being that Allah wants to purify the family of Prophet from every form of corruption. That is why in Islamic society the wives of the Prophet are worthy of special honor and respect because they are unique in being the only spiritual family that enjoys the status of leadership. Hence it is better for them to stay with dignity in their homes which are not common houses but those auspicious places where the Prophet of the age helps them understand the verses of Qur’an. It is incumbent on them to benefit from their exalted position and spread the verses and understanding of Islam.

Anyone who wishes to establish the status of common women on a similar platform and place restrictions on their mobility, should obtain a guaranteed decree of double reward for ordinary women too, like the one that has been promised for the wives of Prophet by Allah. If these verses are not specific to the wives of Prophet, laying down as they do strong yardsticks for them, then what is the reason for subsequent verses that specify different ordinances for ordinary women? “O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when out of doors). That is the most convenient. That they should be known (as such) and not molested” [33:59].

It must be kept in mind that in the verses specifically addressing the wives of the Prophet the guidelines for living such a life are cumbersome; in the first verses it is the wives of the Prophet who are persuaded to remain at home but in the second in which Muslim women are addressed without specificity, it needs to be understood that the emphasis is not on staying at home but upon the principles of going out. Thus in

Islamic society the mobility of women is acknowledged and the behaviour that distinguishes that society from the ignorant infidel one is explained. On the roadside is not an advertisement of a woman, but adorning her is the beauty of the *jilbab* (veil) that renders her personality with an aura of sanctity and sacredness. If it were not to distinguish between standards of the wives of the Prophet and Muslim women in general, then why in one place did Allah address only the wives of Prophet and at another place demand from the Prophet that he should distinguish between his wives, daughters and ordinary women? If even after such clear evidence some people still remain adamant that the order for staying at home is not confined to wives of Prophet only but its implications extend to all Muslims women, then for such a judgment they must bring forward some strong proof.

#### **WOMEN AND THE ARABIC WORD *AWRAH***

Those who want to confine women to their homes maintain the whole personality of women is *Awrah* (i.e. that needs concealment through clothing). They consider woman an entity that needs to be covered with layers of protection including even those parts of the body that are not essential to concealment like face and palms. They do not even permit them to be uncovered when without any clothing. In its extreme form even the voice of a veiled lady is enough to bring a frown on their pious faces. The upholders of such a view do not bring forward any proof from Qur'an or sunnah but consider principles of their own invention enough for such a ban. They consider the mobility of woman to be a precursor for mischief and so without any inhibitions they build the hypothesis of snatching away the active role from women.

Not exclusive to ordinary women, Qur'an has granted permission to the wives of Prophet to talk to non-*mahram* so long as they are clothed with proper hijab. During the prophetic era, his distinguished wives were a primary and important source of religious knowledge. Companions of the Prophet used to benefit from their religious advice. After the demise of the Prophet, for a long time as beautiful and intelligent a lady as Syeda Ayesha continued to enjoy the status of a distinguished teacher. Even her bitter enemies did not find courage to stifle her voice tagging it as a mischief (*fitnah*) or trying to prevent her influence on society.

When the Caliph Umar tried to ascertain a certain amount as Dower money, then from a corner of the mosque a woman's voice rose in opposition reciting the Qur'anic verse: "But if you want to replace one wife with another and you have given one of them a great amount (*qintaar*), do not take (back) from it anything"[4:20]. No one objected to a woman raising a voice for her rights in the assembly of men. Instead her

proof was admitted as authentic and Caliph Umar discarded his view: "A woman got it right and Umar was wrong." In a similar manner when a conflict arose between the Caliph Abu Bakr and Lady Fatima over the orchard of Fadak it is reported that to support her right to the orchard Fatima delivered a complete speech that led to a heated discussion between both of them.

After the martyrdom of Caliph Othman the whole ummah was rife with antagonism over the issue of the Caliphate and the tussle gave birth to the internecine battles of Siffin and Camel. In such a period of mischief, no law was formulated to suppress the voices of women which continued to influence the political system; the leadership of battle of camel was completely in the hands of Syeda Ayesha. Even during that period of conflict no companion had any objection to the public and political role of Syeda Ayesha. It was difficult for them to choose between Syeda Ayesha and Ali. If being a woman was sufficient to revoke a political role for her then a large number of companions would not have supported her.

There was no evidence of Islamic shariah excluding the voices of women from socio-political institutions, otherwise the women of Imam Hussain certainly would not have had the opportunity to employ their brave orators' skills in the court of Yazid in the manner they did. Every sentence was laced with criticism and ridicule against that authoritarian system; however, even one such as that which used every tactic to oppress its dissidents did not try to silence the voices of women with the excuse that they were a source of mischief. When Allah and his Prophet for the fear of tribulation did not suppress the voices of women, then who granted us the right to declare the voice of women unlawful and sinful for the opposite sex? After the evident guidance of the Qur'an and sunnah if a person holds women's voices to be a source of mischief and thus unlawful and seeks to legitimize this by using quotations from Hanafi or Shafe'i, the only response to give them is: "They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords besides Allah" [9:31]. This state of mind has nothing to do with Islam.

#### **MEN HAVE A DEGREE ABOVE...**

"Divorced women shall wait for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah Hath created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise..." [2: 228].

The advent of Islam proved a boon particularly for the class of slaves and women. They were now considered as complete and equal citizens. The determining yardstick for hierarchy became piety, revoking and replacing the old tradition of being a slave or master, man or woman. To free a slave became a deed worthy of great reward and if a person had the opportunity to raise two or three daughters he was rendered eligible for heaven. The classes of both women and slaves found huge opportunity of freedom in Islam. The socio-spiritual revolution became a facilitator of each moment in Medina. Girls, the birth of whom was previously considered pathetic and pitiful, were now treated as equal contributors to the sacred Prophetic mission. For the first time woman was considered as a citizen with an independent viewpoint and wisdom and her consultation and counsel were considered complementary to men's. From the practice of the Prophet it could even be inferred that women can supersede men when it comes to offering counsel and consultation.

During the treaty of Hudaibiyah when the Muslim pilgrims showed reluctance in implementing the orders of the Prophet, what was never expected of them, even the closest companions were guilty of indiscipline. At that moment the Prophet in a mood of perturbation entered the tent of his wife Umm Salma, aggrieved at the turn of events and very sad that his companions were showing reluctance in carrying out his instructions. In those moments of severe crisis Umm Salma gave advice and helped to diffuse the situation. It was indeed a testament of woman's role as a counsellor and advisor for times to come demonstrating the superiority of her gender when it came to dispensing wisdom, advice and reasoning. Later on in the Muslim society, the emphasis on an Islamic revolutionary agenda weakened and the moral standards of the Ummah became frail compared to their earlier strength, and at that point a cautionary and protective mentality started to play its role. The political system had retrogressed from the Prophetic ideal back to monarchy; well-wishers of Islam sought to protect what remained of the social, spiritual and educational life. The number of people who could rise up against the authoritarian system had seriously declined. After the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and internecine battles, many people concluded that the salvation of the Ummah resided in shunning the path of violence and bloodshed while utilizing their energies in non-political fields. Later on with the martyrdom of Imam Zainul Abideen and the mysterious death of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, the sphere of influence of supporters of this view increased. Later on the 'mentality of protection' tried to shunt women out from even those spheres where the Prophet had already provided a space for them. If the moral decline of Muslim society had set in, then the need was to remedy the causes of this fundamental decline, while the efforts to revive the society on



Prophetic lines should have been opted for. Instead the logic of protection was cited and attempts were made to evict women from social life so that in their absence the chances of mischief would be minimized. An interesting example of such mindset is the circumambulation of Ka'ba. It is stated that when the governor of Makkah Muhammad bin Hisham witnessed the circumambulation of Ka'ba, he felt the dual presence of men and women created abundant chances of mischief; so he made a plan to amend few the rules so that men and women remained separate during circumambulation.

But Ata, a famous hadith scholar of his time, would not allow this scheme of things to work. As evidence he maintained that when the wives of Prophet Muhammad participated in heterogeneous circumambulation, how could women be stopped from joint circumambulation with men? If today a few people are still reluctant to see women in important socio-political roles it is not because of fear of mischief in Muslim society, but because in a non-Muslim society, abundant sources of mischief are present already. These people are aware of the fact that mischief percolates through various television channels, through the internet and from varied means of telecommunication, and have found their way in our drawing rooms too.

The reasons they give for obstructing the social role of a Muslim woman are basically a few contemporary abstractions and reservations regarding women that are present only in their own minds. It is a common misconception that mentally and intellectually woman is weaker than man, thus she cannot be given few strategic responsibilities nor she can be made accountable for sensitive issues as she is of defective intellect. Thus according to this view men in every manner have superiority and preference over women, that explains why *lir rijal alihinna daraja*. To prove the superiority of men this Qur'anic verse is quoted irresponsibly and out of context. In a similar manner to dishonor every woman in the world a few poorly educated men use the verse *إن كيدكن عظيم*, whereas the later verses were revealed in the context of ill chartered Lady Aziz of Egypt. Let's first refresh our minds about what *للرجال عليهن درجة* in its complete context means. To repeat the complete verse: "Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. And it is not lawful for them to hide what Allah hath created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the last day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable; But men have a degree over them and Allah is exalted in power, wise" [2:228].

Surely men have a degree of superiority over women but in which respect? For any person who reads this verse with an open mind, it will not be difficult to understand that nature has infused various complexities into male-female relations and if suddenly they are broken for women the reality of separation is much more difficult. Man immediately can think of contracting a second marriage but for a woman waiting for the three periods is essential. So in this context men have been given a more advantageous position and if they think some reformation of domestic affairs is possible they are able to grab the opportunity. Though both have equal rights and neither has any superiority over the other with respect to divorce from its initiation to completion the primary role of man has been acknowledged. The shariah has explained the fundamentals of separation of wife and husband in which the latter holds the status of initiator giving man a degree of superiority over woman. Man can use his right of divorce independently whereas if a woman wants separation she has to take a legal course. In the quoted verse, this 'superiority' has been pointed out.

If this verse is quoted out of context to argue that fundamentally in every sphere of life men have superiority over women, or if someone goes so far as to maintain that all men throughout the world are superior to all women, to do so would be doing a great disservice to the Book of Allah. It is against the teachings, message and ethics of Qur'an that any race, nation, sex or gender can be generalized as superior or inferior. All the emphasis is on individual acts, "To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn" [4:32].

Those people who are of the view that men have superiority over women in all things should consider whether in our own contemporary times any pious stalwart can claim that he is equal in stature with Aseya and Maryam (may Allah be pleased with them)? Even during the time of the companions when the forces of Ali and Syeda Ayesha were battling, no one had the courage to state that Ali had superiority over Syeda Ayesha just because of his sex and gender.

If just being a woman was enough for being spiritually and socially deficient, how was it possible that the exalted Muslim women could be presented as examples and glorified for Muslim men to emulate their exemplary character: "And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of pharaoh. Behold she said 'O my lord! Build for me, in nearness to you, a mansion in the garden and save me from pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong. And Mary the daughter of Imran who guarded her chastity and we breathed into [her body] of our spirit; And she testified to the truth of the words of her lord and of his revelations and was one of the devout (servants) [66:11-12].

The devoted pious Muslim women have been depicted as examples that are worthy to be followed by every man or woman. The Arabic verse *lillazeena aamanu* has been written, so none should have the misconception that the addressees of these verses are Muslim *women* only. All those believing men and women are enjoined by the Qur'an that if they want to achieve the exalted status of belief and desire a house in nearness to Allah in heaven they should follow the path of Ayesha and Maryam. If being a man was enough, then what was the need for the call to follow the path of these pious women in order to achieve nearness to God?

### AND FROM IT CREATED ITS MATE...

Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women; and fear God by whom you demand one of another, and the wombs; surely God ever watches over you [4:1].

In some circles, such theories are propounded that depict the creation of woman as quite inferior to that of man; under the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions the idea has gained currency that woman has been created from the rib of man, so how can a creation that is indebted to a part of man claim equality? Another idea that is quite commonly held is the notion that woman is deficient overall when compared to man and in a few, banking on weak traditions, declare woman to be deficient in intellect and religion.

If in the creation of woman there really is deficiency and she is a lowly creation, it is not in the collective interest of the Ummah that in the presence of numerous men, a woman should be bestowed with some important responsibility. But in order to accept *in toto* any theory or abstraction that is current it is essential to consult the Qur'an and hadith in order to authenticate whether the hypothesis is correct or not!

Every creation of nature, not to speak of woman only, whether great or small, is a masterpiece in its own context, free of flaws and shortcomings. As far as humans are concerned, they have superiority above all other creations. Qur'an says, "We have indeed created man in the best of moulds. No change (there is) in the work (wrought) by Allah" [30:30]. The refusal to consider woman as being created among the best moulds or try to demean her by citing that she is deficient in intellect is untrue to the Qur'anic essence. Consider the verse *وخلق منها زوجها*, "O mankind! Fear your guardian lord who created you from a single person, created out of it, his mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; fear Allah through whom you

demand your mutual (rights) and be heedful of the wombs (that bore you); for Allah ever watches over you” [4:1].

Qur’an has provided scanty details concerning the first human couples, and from that it can be inferred that these details cannot be central to understanding the Qur’anic worldview or *Weltanschauung*. Here we are simply that all men and women have been created from a single soul or person and from the same soul its mate was created. The term ‘soul’ in its essence is feminine. But in the above context it has been used in a broader meaning. Similar is the case of the term *zauj* [spouse] which is masculine but in the broader meaning has been used in abundance throughout the Qur’an. The basic crux of the verse is that all humans whether men or women have been created from a single soul. The soul and substance that has been used in their creation is the same.

Even geographic topographical variations could not become a distinctive wall between them because their source is the same soul. In this verse two basic things have been emphasized, first to fear God and second not to forget the great creative capacity of the womb. It can be understood that this verse, instead of describing an inferior status of woman, is paying tribute in pointing out the great creative capacity she possesses. This brings out the truth that, while demanding one’s mutual rights, the factual reality should not be forgotten that in this universe one’s creation would not have been possible without the love and motherly qualities of a woman.

As far as the biblical story of creation of woman from the rib of man is concerned in the Qur’anic *Weltanschauung* it stands discarded. The Qur’an considers man and woman equal in essence and stature. In no sphere of life does it consider woman as supplementary or peripheral to a man. The Qur’an negates even the biblical story in which woman was solely held responsible for the eviction of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Due to this story there is a common perception that woman has vulnerability to fall prey to whisperers and a natural tendency to be misled. In the contrast to the Bible, the Qur’an holds both man and woman equally responsible for their eviction from the Garden.

“But Satan whispered evil to him; He said “O Adam! Shall I lead you to the tree of eternity and to a kingdom that never decays. In the result they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them; they began to sew together, for their covering leaves from the garden; Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and fell into the error” [20:12].

### MEN ARE PROTECTORS AND MAINTAINERS

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)” [4: 34].

Those who consider woman an inferior creation as compared to men must surely feel that in order to save this ignorant creation from destruction in this world and hereafter, men need to be in charge of their affairs. According to them, the likes-dislikes of woman, her individual freedom and the choice of path in the current and other world all are subservient to the whims of men. In order to legitimize their stand, they take recourse to this Qur’anic verse: “Men are the protectors and the maintainers of woman, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard” [4:34].

This verse has misled some to believe that it is same type of generalized sweeping statement in which superiority of men over women has been depicted, but pondering over this verse in the Qur’anic world view the misconception is rendered ill founded. The first thing to be understood is that in this verse no general holistic order of men’s superiority has been described. The next part of the verse that describes the basis of superiority of term *qawwam*, restricts its holisticity. Men are superior to women because some have been given superiority over others. Secondly men spend on women from their wealth. In the basic unit of society i.e. the family, if man has the status of superiority (*qawwam*) it is because he is the administrator of the family and he has to be responsible for discharging the family’s expenses.

The essence of justice is that on woman the great responsibility of pro creation is bestowed which certainly makes her exempt from economic ventures. In Islamic society having all the responsibility for securing bread and butter has earned man the title of being *qawwam*. Being superior is an economic responsibility, and in no way means that man is physically, intellectually or spiritually superior to a woman. In fulfilling the requirements of being superior, one condition is related to being a man that has been granted naturally, though the second requirement is different. If for any

reason man cannot fulfill his economy responsibilities or is irresponsible towards it, his superiority is in danger.

Those who quote this verse to depict the superiority of men translate it as *فالصالحات قانتات* as “Muslim women are obedient to their husbands.” Here the term obedience means obedience to God, not to husbands. The term *qanitaat* whenever used in other places points towards Allah. Further, do those people who think that this verse points to the superiority of men infer from it that all the men in the world are superior to women? If not, then who is superior to whom? Instead of being a general order this verse is limited to the small family structure. Further it is a fact that not all men in the world are superior to women but only the few who have superiority over the other few. The degree of superiority of men in this verse has been described in terms of their economic and earning capacity, it is neither a description of their physical strength nor does it point out their intellectual or spiritual superiority. The economic aspect and capability of man is responsible for man’s key role and stature in the family where his views are very important. This exalted status is because of his role as an earning entity which Allah interprets as his mercy. Man’s unique status that is a result of his role as an administrator of the home is confined to economic issues only. As far as his educational or intellectual superiority is concerned it all depends on his own efforts; in a similar manner, a wife should accept the economic superiority of her husband with an open heart as Allah has given him this responsibility and through various trials and tribulations, he tries to make her life comfortable. In running the affairs of the home his position is that of a boss, but being superior does not give him a right to demand complete obedience from his woman nor is her religious, spiritual or educational progress completely dependent on his whims. The individual status and identity of woman is evident, and above all she has to be concerned about this life and the afterlife. Therefore, she will be held accountable for the responsibility of creating a pious society.

As no ‘superior man’ can be her helper in that test, so no ‘superior man’ can be given the license that he should shirk the struggle for dominance of Islam and stop his woman from participating in the same case. Prophet Muhammad has stated: “one who does not obey God should not be obeyed.”

### WOMEN AND STATECRAFT

In an Islamic society the basic identity of a man and woman are related to the ummah. Like a man, woman too was an important part of the Prophetic mission. She was always concerned with the development of the Islamic movement and the steps

that needed to be taken which in order to ensure its success. She felt equally responsible for establishing the Islamic system of justice. In the evolution of the Islamic movement from the stage of politics to all the phases it passed through, woman like man was always at the forefront. Whether the issue was sacrificing wealth, leaving the homeland or being martyred or killing in the path of Allah, the Qur'an demands similar sacrifices from women. So there is no reason why when the Islamic state is established, woman should find herself aloof from it! The society for whose establishment she has staked her life and wealth, how can she be careless of its future? If Islam does not consider women spiritually and intellectually inferior to men there is no reason to stop women from participation in statecraft. For these reasons in the period of the caliphate it was essential to seek advice from women on important policy issues and in choosing a caliph their opinions mattered too. After the death of Caliph Umar when among the contenders for caliph there was a tie between Uthman and Ali, and choosing one out of the two became difficult, Abdul Rahman ibn Auf while trying out to reach to concrete conclusion, met various key and important figures that included women also (البداية والنهاية). Even when the need arose to take some strategic decisions and a woman decided in her individual capacity that decision was honored by the Islamic state.

A tradition is related by Umm Hani bint Abu Talib who says: "The year Makkah was conquered I went to Prophet saying 'O Prophet of God! My brother Ali has decided to kill a person to whom I have given refuge.' Prophet stated: 'O Umm Hani! We also reiterate our refuge to whom you have already promised protection.' Syeda Ayesha led the battle of camel and even in those turbulent times she tried to give a positive direction to the affairs of state. From her example it is evident that Muslim women cannot remain aloof from statecraft. After the martyrdom of Caliph Othman, it was genuinely felt that the basic foundations of the Islamic state had been hit, the administrative gears of state had broken down, rebels were roaming free and a state of anarchy was prevailing. The conditions were so bad that even a courageous person like Ali was disheartened and was not ready to take up the responsibility of the caliphate. When the anarchic atmosphere cooled down, it was observed that even the caliph was helpless before the rebels. Syeda Ayesha had two options before her, either be a witness of the annihilation of the Islamic state or stand up for its reformation. She chose the later option. She sent her emissaries to different parts and appealed to Muslims to be a part of her reform movement. But the result of the Battle of Camel was not encouraging. The blood of Muslims had been split on a large scale but had not resulted in securing the expected goals. After the failure of the battle, in a later period a general

feeling developed among Muslims that under the command of a woman no battle could be won. A similar mentality was prevalent among the majority of Muslim regarding rebellion against a government (*kharooj*). Both have the similar justification i.e. avoiding bloodshed while serving the status quo. In the first Muslim generation in spite of their continuous efforts, the caliphate could not be re-established on the Prophetic lines. Even the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his family was not successful in overthrowing the monarchy and it became common among Muslims to observe that it was in the best interests of the ummah to avoid bloodshed and to try to impose Islam in other spheres of life. Authoritarian rulers need not be opposed. Slowly and steadily this theory became an accepted norm and today a large number of ulama follow it. The unsuccessful attempt of Syeda Ayesha gave further currency to these negative thoughts about women's leadership and later on the hadith about women leadership that: 'A nation will not find salvation if it accepts a woman as its leader.' This was related after the defeat of Syeda Ayesha in the Battle of Camel, otherwise there was no reason for an ummah for which the word of Allah and His Prophet was supreme and binding, to have accepted such a compromising stand. The whole paradigm of thinking changed from the time when during the decisive battle the Qur'an had been raised and made the yardstick for the outcome. In that environment if this hadith had been known to people before the battle, then none would have come forth in support of Syeda Ayesha. For Syeda Ayesha too it would have been impossible if such a hadith had been current, to command an Islamic army.

When Islam does not discriminate on the basis of sex, color or race, and advocates vociferously that piety is the sole yardstick, how could it be that its Prophet would remove any wise Muslim lady from leadership just on the basis that she was a woman? Is it the truth that under the leadership of a woman no nation can find salvation? Let us now see what Qur'an has to say about it.

While describing the story of the Queen of Sheeba, the Qur'an informs us that she was a lady ruler but she is never mentioned as the cause of the doom of her nation, and in reality nothing of this sort happened. In contrast the story of the Queen of Sheeba points out in detail how the wisdom and pragmatism of a lady not only was her own guidance but put her whole nation on the path of righteousness. The Qur'an makes it clear that the decision to leave the worship of false gods and accept only one God as worthy of worship is completely her own decision. Now witness how steadfast the queen was about accepting the truth and salvation in afterlife:



﴿قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلِّفْتُ كِتَابًا كَرِيمًا. إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. أَلَا تَعْلَمُونَ عَلَيَّ وَأُتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ. قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ. قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُو قُوَّةٍ وَأُولُو بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ. قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعْرَاجَ أَهْلِهَا آذِلَّةً ۗ وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ. وَإِنِّي مُرْسَلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ﴾ [27:29-35]

The Queen said, 'You chiefs! Here is delivered to me a letter worthy of respect. It is from Solomon, and is (as follows): In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful: 'be you not arrogant against me, but come to me in submission (to the true religion).' She said, 'You chiefs! Advise me in (this) my affair; no affair have I decided except in your presence! They said: 'we are endued with strength and given to vehement war; but the command is with you, so consider what will you command! She said, 'kings when they enter a country, despoil it, and make the noblest of its people its meanest, thus do they behave. But I am going to send him a present, and (wait) to see with what (answer) return (my) ambassadors.' [27:29-35]

Then a stage came when she declared: 'Oh my God! I have wronged my spirit. Now I accept the faith at the hands of Solomon in one God who is the Lord of both worlds' [27:44].

The most highlighted aspect of this story is that after receiving the message from Solomon to accept the faith the queen's behavior is that of a seeker of truth. The letter of Solomon has the status of a 'sacred parchment' for her. She neither discards it out of the arrogance of her power nor gives any importance to the assurance of her courtiers who want to resolve this issue on the basis of strength and power-play. In contrast her manner changes to become a journey of discovery and seeking truth. By sending her ambassador with gifts she wants to find out whether Solomon is a real Prophet or it is just adopting another tactic of power play for annexing her kingdom. So when the authenticity of Solomon's prophethood and the mercy of the monotheist God is clear to her, without any hesitation she embraces the faith. She does not feel the need to return home and reason things out with her courtiers. From sun worshipping to belief in one God, from ignorance to the path of salvation, she traverses the path to discovery solitarily. She does not feel the need of any helper or fellow traveler. In this journey not only does she come out successful but her whole nation finds salvation.

Thus the salvation of a nation does not depend on the issue as to whether its affairs are in the hands of a man, or if a woman is commanding them. The basic qualities demonstrated are the urge for accepting the truth, God-consciousness, wisdom and pragmatism. If those qualities are found in a lady she becomes the Queen of Sheeba and her wisdom and pragmatism become an example for later generations to emulate. If a male ruler becomes devoid of these qualities then in the form of Abraha, who on account of his stubbornness and false arrogance leaves behind a legacy of admonition from which future generations still learn a lesson. He is himself doomed and becomes a cause of doom for his whole nation.

### WOMEN AND SOCIAL LIFE

Islamic society is an ideological society and it is a movement of the future. Be they man, woman, old or young everyone is concerned that they should not fall short of the exalted status of being caliphs (vicegerents) on earth. Men and women both have equal roles in this just organisation, for the protection and evolution of which both are equally responsible. So how can in such a society woman altogether be excluded from the public life? Women are as active in an Islamic society as men are. But their mobility and public life are subservient to the protocols that Islam has imposed over them. While observing hijab a woman can excel in every field of life. Islam has not only granted her the right to ownership of property, she also has the right to maintain it and she has the freedom to increase it through trade or skills. In the Prophetic era women who were famed for their experience in trade and business, the topmost among them being Umm bani Anmar. In the Prophetic era it was not looked down upon if a woman left her home for trading. Tirmidhi has related an incident from Abu Yasir of how a woman came to purchase something from him. Caliph Umar appointed Shifa bint Abdullah as market inspector. How a woman participated in a man's work outside the home is detailed explicitly through the example of Asma binti Abu Bakr in Bukhari. It testifies to the fact that in the Prophetic era Muslim women were a part of public life. While describing her participation in the work of her husband Zubair, Asma relates, "I used to mount a basket of flowers on my head from the land the Prophet had given to Zubair. This land was around three kilometers away from my home. One day when I was returning with the basket on my head the Prophet met me and he was accompanied by many Medinian companions (*Ansar*). The Prophet offered me a seat behind him on the camel but I felt shy being part of a men's group. The Prophet realized that modesty was the reason for my reluctance. So he continued his journey without me. Later when I related this incident to Zubair and told him how

along with a party of Ansar I met the Prophet and that I declined his offer. Even when he (Prophet) dismounted from his camel so that I could sit behind him I said to Zubair basically I felt quite shy.”

Islam neither supports the water-tight compartmentalization between men and women nor gives permission for their free mixing. There is neither scope for locking down women in their homes nor is it allowed for women to drink and dance in public congregations contravening Allah’s law. Here women and men met outside their homes, in common association or on highways. If in any public place a woman is in distress and a man comes forward to help her, the ‘pious’ should not frown. See how the Qur’an describes the meeting between the daughters of Jacob and the Prophet Moses:

﴿وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ وَوَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ تَذُودَانِ ۗ  
 قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُمَا ۗ قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّى يُصَدِرَ الرِّعَاءُ ۗ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ﴾ [28:23]

“And when he arrived at the watering place in madyan, he found there a group of men watering (their flocks) and besides them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said, ‘What is the matter with you?’ they said, ‘we cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take back (their flocks): And our father is a very old man.’” [28:23].

Masjid is the jugular vein of the social life of Muslims. Its doors are as open for women as they are for men, though women have been given a general leave from congregational prayers, but if someone tries to exclude them from the socio-political life of the mosque this contravenes the Prophetic order, “Do not stop women from going to mosques.” Imam Muslim has related through Abdullah ibn Umar, an incident where his son even after listening to the above hadith said that as a protective measure he would not allow a woman from his household to go to a mosque at night, so Abdullah bin Umar became very angry. He said, “I state that the Prophet has settled this issue and still you dare to withhold your permission.” Whether by day or night, when conditions of uncertainty or peace prevail, the Islamic Shariah permits a woman to maintain her presence in mosques. When Islam welcomes women in its sanctified holy places like the Ka’ba and the Prophet’s mosque, and when the presence of women during the Hajj period is an evident fact, then how can we prevent her participation in daily social life? In the Prophetic era there could hardly be a public gathering where women were not present. On the occasions of the Eids the Prophet had stressed that even those women who were having their monthly periods and were not in a position to offer prayers should still come to the public prayer space. “Every woman old, with

child, or having her period should participate in the Eid congregation without fail and benefit from the mercy of Islam. But women having periods should not participate in the prayers” (*Bukhari*).

In the congregations held at the Prophet’s mosque men and women jointly participated. From a deeper study of hadith it can be inferred that women did not participate merely as spectators aloof from the discussion, but used to actively participate in the question-and-answer sessions, debates and deliberations. On one occasion while the Prophet was delivering the sermon a woman tried ask what the reason was for the majority of women being delivered to hell (Muslim). Abu Hurairah has related an incident during joint congregation when the “Prophet having just finished his prayers, addressed us and ordered that we all sit down. He then stated: ‘Is there someone who while having intercourse with his wife closes the doors, but when he comes out describes to everyone his sexual conduct? Every man present stayed silent. Then then the Prophet addressed the women, and enquired does anyone share her sexual conduct with other women?’ After listening to it a young lady stood on her knees while leaning her neck forward to the Prophet so that he could see her and her conversation was given a serious hearing. She said: ‘I swear by God all men discuss these issues amongst themselves and similarly women too.’ The Prophet said, ‘Are you aware how this act of yours looks? It is as though any satanic couple on a public highway tried to satisfy the carnal desires.’” (*Ahmad and Abu Dawood*)

‘When due to the crowd, it became difficult for women to hear the Prophet clearly and audibly and they needed to receive answers on issues that could not be discussed in joint congregations as modesty was an obstacle, they asked if men only had exclusionary rights over him (the Prophet). Accepting this demand a particular day was assigned just for women’ (*Bukhari*).

### WOMEN IN THE BATTLEFIELD

When Islamic society is consolidated as an Islamic state and the Muslim army is engaged in propagation of Islam in far off places, woman has not been endowed with direct responsibility to participate in such battles. While Muslim men are in a position to perform this duty well, then she is exempted from the battlefield. But if she wants to participate then it is her voluntary decision. Given a situation when Muslims and Islam are at their lowest ebb and the entire ummah is passing through a phase of decline that is the lowest in its history, when despite the Herculean efforts of Muslim men it is not possible to overthrow the system of deceit and deception, in such a crisis the Qur’an expects women like men to sacrifice their lives and money in the righteous path. “And

their lord has accepted of them and answered them: Never will I suffer to be lost, the work of anyone of you, be the male or female: you are members of one of another. Those who have left their homes, and were driven out therefrom and suffered harm in my cause, and fought and were slain, verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities and admit them into gardens with rivers flowing beneath a reward from Allah is the best of rewards” [3:195].

The context of revelation of this Qur’anic verse was the period when the ummah was proceeding to the establishment of a strong reformatory system. The battles of Badr and Uhud were decisive for the survival of the ummah. As compared to their enemies, Muslims were weak in terms of both men and material. It was inevitable that whatever strength the ummah had needed to be employed in these decisive battles. It is for this reason that in order to consolidate the Muslim ummah and before the conquest of Makkah women were participating in the battles. After the establishment of the Islamic state and suppression of infidels, very few instances are related about the participation of women on battlefields. In the battles of the Prophetic era women participated enthusiastically. Mostly their role was that of paramilitary staff. If during the battles it was felt that the Muslim army was in retreat, then they would actively join the battlefield. Bukhari has related from Anas that when during the battle of Uhud the Muslim army was being routed he saw that Syeda Ayesha and Umm Saleem had water bags on their backs and were quenching the thirst of the injured. After the victory at Badr, the battle of Uhud had a decisive importance for the future of Muslims. It was astutely planned so that whatever strength the ummah had was utilized for it. For this reason the participation of women was more in evidence at Uhud as compared to other battles. Various historians have documented the bravery of Nusaiba bint Kaab who joined the battle of Uhud with the intention of quenching the thirst of the injured, but when the battle for the future of Islam entered a decisive phase, she then directly participated in the fighting. She did a lot of damage to enemy soldiers and they were terrified. Thus, when the battle of Uhud entered a perilous phase, and even the Prophet Muhammad was surrounded by enemies, then in such a dangerous situation Nusaiba joined in defence of the Prophet (*Tabaqat*) who heaped praise on her extraordinary bravery.

Other women in hadith are exalted because they were a part of the medical aid team of the Muslim army. Laila Alghaffaria was one such lady who was permitted by the Prophet to participate in such endeavors. She had the expertise to treat the injured and look after the sick (*al-Isaba*). According to Bukhari her primary responsibility was to provide water to the thirsty, treat the injured and transport the corpses of the

martyred to Medina. In the medical aid team at Uhud, Hamna bint Jahash's name is quite prominent. The women of the Prophetic era did not consider themselves as weak and helpless and were not under the false impression that at moments of great fear their protection was completely assigned to men. When they found that their lives and those of the children were in danger they decided to take the appropriate measures. In the battle of the Trench, the army of enemies was too big and the field of battle was wide. It was not possible for the Muslims to dedicate a group of men to protect the women in forts so Hassan bin Thaabit was assigned the job. It was assumed the enemy did not know about the actual situation inside the fort, and there was no expectation of an enemy attack. However a Jew tried to sneak in through a wall. He would have become acquainted with the real situation, but understanding the implications Safiya bint Abdullah killed the him rendering her own life vulnerable (*al-Isabah*). In some traditions it is related that she cut off the head and threw it out of the fort so that the enemy would believe that a number of men were defending inside, thus shielding the fort from attack.

Women's participation in battles was not just defensive nor was it a fact that they lacked courage to participate proactively and were content to be part of the paramilitary forces. There are even examples when women participated like men in jihad. Umm al-Zuhak bint Masood is described as having participated in the battle of Khyber and that the Prophet gave her a share in the war booty like the men. Nusaiba bint Kaab who participated in battle of Uhud was part of the battle of Yamaama in which her son Abdullah was martyred and one of her arms was slain too (*al-Isaba*). Also mentioned in the history books is the dagger Umm Saleem bint Malhan used in battle of Hunain. Who is not aware of the glad tidings that the Prophet gave her, that she too would be part of the group of men who for Allah's sake journeyed through the seas as she desired (*Bukhari*). Despite being aware that she was a woman the Prophet prayed for her during her participation in those far off battles.

#### **VEILING: BUT TO WHAT EXTENT?**

A common perception concerning the veil is that it is an Islamic requirement but in our times it is not practical to observe it. It is for this reason that in families where wearing the veil is now rarely practiced and the free mixing of men and women is the norm, there is no open ideological rebellion against the veil. The understanding is that if we want to maintain our grip on the present then the veil has to go. This is similar thinking to that employed by Muslims who consider it possible to follow Islam without its system of rules. Similarly many Muslim sisters are trying to build their worldly and

religious lives around not observing the rule of the veil. In line with this kind of reasoning is their desire and enthusiasm for including prayers and paying consideration to the afterlife in their programme.

Furthermore, common understanding of the veil is often so antagonistic and varied that it is difficult for an ordinary Muslim woman to weigh up the real meaning and conception that Allah and the Prophet have enshrined in the veil. Even for those women who have discarded the veil, and who while engaging in the daily affairs of life have landed in a place quite distant from it, if the desire to observe wearing the veil suddenly springs up, they suppress the idea thinking that contemporary rules surrounding veiling would not be suitable to their situation. They consider the rigid traditions that are prevalent in our society in the name of the veil cannot be synchronized with an active mobile life. The net result is that, the more Muslim women are engaging with public life, the more observance of veiling is showing a decline. Those (Muslims) who are observing and practicing veiling or who support it can be victims of extremism, and those who have broken free of every restriction and are independently pursuing a material life, being unconcerned about the divine teaching concerning veiling, they too have strayed from the path of truth. The need of the hour is to once again include Muslim women as part of society, and Muslim society should be so inclusive that in contrast to unIslamic systems our Muslim sister should be able to find more independence of mobility and freedom within the ambit of Islamic society. This will become possible only when our society gives Muslim woman all those rights that God and the Prophet gave her but which traditional societies slowly but inexorably took away.

Veiling is a sign of freedom for Muslim women. *Jilbab* not only gives her the feeling of being protected, it is a declaration of the fact that a Muslim woman while observing the shariah norms of veiling can contribute positively to Muslim society by playing an active role. It is a declaration that Islam has provided for both men and women equal opportunities to please Allah and for establishing a pious environment for upholding the banner of God, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and allowing everyone to perform according to their capacity. A few principles are therefore enshrined in public social life for men and women so that people who are working day and night for the establishment of a righteous society do not fall prey to human whims and vulnerabilities.

For people who have come out of their homes with the intention to please Allah, determined that their actions should not be attended by failure, interaction within this social arrangement will not cause situations of vice to arise, so long as this regulation

for the faithful is implemented: “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and protect their modesty.” Similarly believing women are ordered “To lower their gaze and protect their modesty!”

It has been further demanded that they do not to display their attractiveness except what is evident and cover up their bosoms. They should not walk in such a manner as to display their concealed beauty. As compared to men the mobility of women is subject to certain rules. In this context, in other verses it has been explained in what ways Muslim women can conceal their beauty while going outside. Inside the home the use of a small stole (*khimar*) is enough, while when leaving home a large veil i.e. *jilbab* has been ordered. As far as the issue of timing and feasibility of women leaving homes is concerned, or which work can be considered important and which non-essential, on these points no explicit order has been drafted. It has been left for people to decide which form of activity is helpful for the establishment of a refined Islamic society and which can hamper its sanctity. So keeping in view the primary principles of Islam, Muslim society has to decide for itself how to arrange matters in such a way that Muslim men and women can best utilize their energies on behalf of that society. Depending on the changing needs and demands the expectations and duties of men and women can change accordingly. For example, if in a tumultuous situation of war the strength of men is not sufficient to protect the Muslim society from enemies, then in such circumstances additional responsibilities will fall on Muslim women.

Changing social and political conditions will shape new roles for men and women. Tumultuous conditions will impose more responsibilities on women while with normal routine the demands and expectations will not be too many. Therefore, in social life the role of woman or man is not rigid or unchanging. Sometimes being active in public life is fulfilling for women and at other junctures performing her responsibilities inside the home has been given priority even though being confined within four walls is a challenge.

For each era Islam enjoins a practicable system of life. There is no reason therefore that its moral values and restrictions on free mixing of men and women should be beyond implementation. If Islam seeks observance of veiling from Muslim women then in every time and in every place it ought to be quite implementable. No strict jurist has the right or permission, after the explicit Qur’anic injunctions have been followed, to either soften or to increase the quota of demands on women when it comes to the issue of veiling.



In our opinion, the Qur'anic concept of the veil raises no difficulties with regard to observation either in the past or the present. Problems arise when we explain and interpret the Qur'anic requirements out of caution and according to our own mind, thereby extending a few basic things. While doing so we forget the fact that exaggeration in religion is despicable. The Prophet stated "Avoid exaggeration in religious issues because previous nations were doomed because of exaggeration in religion. We must remember this fact that those who exaggerate in the boundaries set by Allah are the real tyrants."

### THE QUR'ANIC VEIL

Related to the veil two sets of verses are present in Qur'an. One set is directly related to the wives of the Prophet and the other is addressed to the ordinary Muslim women. Those relating to the wives of the Prophet have very strict injunctions concerning the veil. In fact, the verse in which the word hijab is used, commonly known as 'the verse of the hijab', basically teaches ordinary Muslims how to conduct themselves while entering the house of the Prophet. In this verse Muslims are told that when they demand something from wives of the Prophet they should do it with a curtain veil between them. Later in one verse it is related that after the demise of the Prophet none should dare to marry his wives because it would be a blunder in the eyes of God. Look at the whole verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرٍ نَاظِرِينَ إِنَاهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا  
دُعِيتُمْ فَأَدْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ ۚ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي  
مِنْكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ ۗ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ۚ ذَلِكُمْ  
أَظْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكِحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ  
أَبَدًا ۚ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا ﴿٥٣﴾ [33:53]

"O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses until leave is given you, for a meal [and then] not [so early as] to wait for its preparation; but when you are invited enter, and when you have taken your meal disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such [behavior] annoys the Prophet he is shy to dismiss you, but Allah is not shy [to tell you] the truth. And when you ask [his ladies] for anything you want, ask them from before a screen; that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you that you should annoy Allah's messenger or that you should marry his widows after him at any time. Truly such a thing is in Allah's sight an enormity" [33:53].

Three things have been determined in these verses. First, how the faithful should behave if invited to the Prophet's home for a meal. Secondly, how things should be conducted if a need arises to ask for something from wives of the Prophet. And lastly the idea of marrying any wives of Prophet should not arise because it is a great sin in the eyes of God. For wives of the Prophet casual talking is abhorred because they are unlike common women.

“O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women. If you do fear (Allah), be not too complaisant of speech, lest in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire; but speak you a speech (that is) just. And stay quietly in your houses and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance: and establish regular prayer and give Zakat and obey Allah and his Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, you members of the family and to make you pure and spotless and recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes of the signs of Allah and his wisdom for Allah is all subtle, all aware [33:32-34].

A few verses before these addressing the wives of the Prophet, the Qur'an warns them: “O Prophet! Say to your wives, ‘If it be that you desire the life of this world, and its glitter-then come! I will provide for your enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. But if you seek Allah and his Messenger and the home of the hereafter verily Allah has prepared for the well doers amongst you a great reward. O wives of the Prophet if any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct the punishment would be doubled to her and that is easy for Allah. But any of you that is devout in the service of Allah and his Messenger and works righteousness - to her shall we grant her reward twice and we prepared for her a generous sustenance” [33: 28-31].

It is evident that for those who have been promised special rewards, whose good deeds fetch double rewards, the standard of their lives would certainly be exacting. For those who accrue special rewards, expectations of special and specific deeds are only natural. They are also sensitized to the fact that they are neither similar to common women nor are their homes like ordinary ones. They belong to the home of the Prophet of the age where the Revelation of truth and wisdom is generated. Theirs is an exalted status such as can be found in no other home in the world and it demands that the wives of the Prophet stay strictly in their homes and recite the verses full of wisdom and dignity. Allah wants the exalted family with leadership status to remain free from all tarnish. This is the rigid yardstick that Allah has standardized for the women of Prophet. If anyone wishes to conclude from these verses that these highest standards are to be expected in toto from ordinary Muslim women too then they

should also guarantee the double rewards that are attached to these demanding restrictions.

Even a beginner in the Qur'an can understand that surah Ahzab distinctly addresses the women of the Prophet and not ordinary women. Why? The reason is quite evident. From the wives of the Prophet distinctive ways of life have been demanded and definitive rules have been revealed for them in these verses. It has been stated that even the smallest mistake can lead to vilification of the Prophet's family and serious damage to its sanctity. So if they are desirous of an Afterlife they should render themselves liable to strict discipline. Not only do they become eligible for double rewards but they are also now mothers of all believers, a status that none other can claim. It is as a result of this status that after the death of the Prophet no one has the right even to think about marriage with them. How ludicrous then for someone to draw a general analogy from these specific verses addressed to the Prophet's wives!

Let us now turn to the verses that address common Muslim women: "O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when out of doors); that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is oft forgiving most Merciful" [33:59].

The same topic has been further explained in surah an-Nur:

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do and say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husband, their father, their husband father, their sons, their husbands sons, their brother or their brother's sons or their sister's sons, or their women or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of sexual desires or small children who have no carnal knowledge of women; And that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments" [24:30-31].

The first two verses decide the boundaries of covering up. Collectively the rules that can be inferred from these verses are as follows:

- i) It is mandatory for Muslim women to cover up themselves while leaving their homes.

- ii) It is expected from both Muslim men and women that they will lower their gaze and guard their modesty.
- iii) Muslim women should be concomitant to cover up their bosoms (chest).
- iv) It is not permissible for Muslim women to display their beauty except that what is evident and what cannot be concealed.
- v) It is necessary for Muslim women to conceal their beauty except for a few near relations who are exempted.
- vi) It is not permissible for Muslim women to strike their feet in such a manner that they become a centre of attraction for people.

These basic principles are mandatory for every Muslim woman to follow. There can be no exaggeration or curtailment of these principles. While observing these principles and rules she is free to contribute as per her capacity to the Islamic society.

In the Prophetic sayings wherever *jilbab* is mentioned, it meant a veil or coverlet that women use while going out. Bukhari and Muslim have related through Umm Atiya that when the Prophet Muhammad gave women the order to participate in the congregational Eid prayers, they asked: “O Prophet of God, one among us does not possess a coverlet.’ He said: ‘can’t she borrow one from her sister?’”

*Khimar* is that small stole or coverlet that is commonly used to cover head and bosom inside the home. It is mentioned in a hadith that *jilbab* and *khimar* cover one’s head and bosom but not the face nor do the verses mention any rule for covering the face. Those trying to infer from these verses the rule for covering the face translate the verse as: “they should drape themselves with a whole body cover including face.” Anyone who is acquainted with a modicum of Arabic can easily understand that this is an uncalled for exaggeration. Such a translation does not fit well with the original Arabic where the word *adna* means near. Thus Raghīb Asfahani has written in *Mufridaat*:

دانيت بين الامرین، ادنيت احدهما من الآخر

Similarly, Ibn Abbas in his exegesis of this verse has stated that the real meaning is that the coverlet should be near the face but not over it or covering it.

As far as the question of the face veil is concerned, this rule is specific to the wives of the Prophet. Bukhari and Muslim both have quoted from Anas: “when during the battle of Khyber, Safiya bint Hai came, the companions conversed amongst themselves, whether Prophet had married her or kept her as a servant? So they said if she is draped in a veil then it is understood that the Prophet has married her and if not then it means she is a servant.”

Regarding the face it is the collective view of the ulama that it is not included among the parts that need to be concealed. Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik and Imam Shafe'i support this view. It is related in authentic sayings of the Prophet that while wearing the loose unstitched dress for performing Hajj or Umrah covering the face or wearing gloves is not allowed.

Let us now analyze the verse on whose exegesis the whole edifice of the face veil is built. Tabari, Jassas, Razi etc have quoted an incident related to this verse whose crux is that during the period of ignorance hypocrites used to harass Muslim women so in order distinguish common slave women from free women, God ordered them to cover up.

Razi, while trying to give the interpretation more legitimacy, has stated that there can have two meanings. Firstly, the dress will identify them as women of the elite and their movement will not be hindered. Secondly, the common people will come to know that these women are not open to fornication because women who are so cautious in staying away from strange men that they conceal their faces that are not even obligatory must be adhering to exceptionally high moral standards. So no person can expect that such a woman would be ready for fornication. This has been related by Ibn Abi Sabra on the authority of Ibn Kaab Al Qarzi. Various historical mistakes are present in this incident that form evidence for its weakness.

Firstly this tradition does not go beyond Ibn kaab Al Qarzi and Qarzi was a second generation Muslim. This hadith has a broken chain (*mursal*.) Also Ibn Abi Sabrah was infamous for exaggerating the hadith. In the explanation of this verse, he is trying to build up virtuous ladies who conceal their faces, while relating many incidents and all of them are *mursal*. They are in no way related to real facts. This incident also clashes with that aspect of Islamic culture in which on the level of faith slave and master free women have been treated on a par with each other. Otherwise what type of Islamic society is it where noble women are saved from bad men by concealing their faces and slave women are left to be exploited by the same set of men? The exegetes of this school of thought based and built their evidence on weak tradition and had strange ideas about slave women. Have a look at this marvel, Abu Bakr Jassas writes in his *Ahkam-ul-Qur'an*: "It is legal for unmarried men to have a look at the hair, arms, legs, chest and breasts of a slave women". One may ask, what remains to be seen, then?

Islam doesn't discriminate between free and slave women. Slave, master, men and women all are equal before Islam. The yardstick for greatness and exalted status is piety. Fornication if done with slave women or free ones is fornication. For a chaste

society no concessions can be given. If for some the use of coverlet or face veil is mandatory so that modest women can be distinct taking the Qur'anic verses out of context and interpreting them in a strange manner is uncalled for.

We should take the meaning at face value and as it is reinforced by the practice of women during the Prophetic era. Regarding the rule for veiling the crux of the matter is as follows: these verses conclude that it is mandatory for Muslim women when leaving their homes that they should don coverlets, though they are permitted not to conceal their hands and face so that they can finish their daily chores without incumbrance as they used to do during the Prophetic era.

As far as those people who place too much emphasis on a face veil are concerned, in reality they are ignorant of the true injunctions. The factual reality is that these people are prioritizing their own whims and personal views over the binding Qur'anic rules of veiling. If we read the interpretation and proofs given by these ulama we discover that in order to justify their personal point of view they bring forward evidence not from the Qur'an or sunnah but try to support their arguments by citing the 'principles of caution'. While indulging their own ideas they forget that God and his Prophet were much more aware and knowledgeable of pragmatism and caution. So when he permitted Muslim women not to conceal their faces and hands, who are you to increase the boundaries of Allah, seeking refuge in the claim that you are curtailing mischief?

All schools of thought have consensus on the issue that the face is not a private part that needs to be concealed. According to the Hanafi school of thought it is allowed for a woman not to conceal her face and hands. There is, however, a difference among Malikis over this issue. One section makes concealing hands and face mandatory while others support keeping them unconcealed. A majority of Shafe'i ulama do not consider concealing the face to be mandatory but do take concealment to be positive. For Hanbalis beautified and simple faces are distinct. Similar distinction is made between extraordinary beautiful and simple women. Whether jurists are supporting face veil or not, there is consensus about the fact that face of a woman is not a private part.

Even after these explanations some people vehemently support the face veil because according to them uncovered faces invite mischief. Some consider the face to be the center of physical attraction. They argue that if the whole body is concealed and the face left open it is like closing every small door of a castle or fort in order to keep enemy at bay, while leaving the central gate open. For Syed Abu'l Al'a Mawdudi this argument is the chief one amongst many that he has brought to the fore regarding the face veil. Who will intimate to them that the door that Allah and his Prophet does not

want to close, none among them has the right to close it. Islam is the name of this behavior where “Allah and his Prophet permit something which should be adhered to and if they disallow something, then it should be abhorred”. We certainly have no power to implement or increase any order on our own just to curtail mischief. If the face of women arouses some psychologically sick men and if such have problems in taking care of their faith, then the moral and spiritual training of this section of men is needed. Their shortcomings should not be a cause for imposing those bans or curtailments on women that shariah has not ordered on them and that certainly are not found in the Prophetic Islamic society.

Islam does not support any society where the individual identity of women is annihilated. The concept of faceless Muslim women is incommensurable with early Muslim society. In the first era Muslim women held distinguished positions in different fields of life. They were recognized by their faces. In fact in history books, and Ahadith the exalted women who are mentioned are identified on the basis of their facial features. Let me relate a few cases. The woman who objected to Caliph Umar’s opinion on the issue of dower money when he was delivering his sermon has been documented as being a flat-nosed woman. Qais bin Abi Haaz has related that he saw Asma bint Umais at Abu Bakr’s place and she was a fair skinned lady whose both hands had moles on them (*Tabari*). Ibn Saleel has related when his daughter came to meet her father Abu Zarr few people were present – she was wearing a woolen dress and her cheeks were pressed together (*Tabaqat*). Imran bin Husaiyyan says: “I was sitting with Prophet Muhammad when Fatima came, we saw her face had become pale. Prophet supplicated for Fatima. After the supplication I saw that the color of her face had returned (Ibn Jarir, Tahzeeb). Qabisa bin Jabir reports that three of them including an old lady of Bani Asad, went to Ibn Masood. The lady had marks on her forehead, and he disliked them. Abu Asma Al Rajabi relates that they went to Abu Zarr Ghaffari and saw that one of his wives was black (Ahmad & Ibn Saad). Urwah bin Abdullah says that once when he went to visit Fatima bint Ali bin Abu Talib he saw a ring on her fingers (*Tabaqat*). These and similar incidents are proof enough of the fact that in Prophetic era it was uncommon for Muslim women to conceal their faces and hands.

If today, as in the first era, Muslim society were to revive and grant all those freedoms to women that they enjoyed previously, within the boundaries of veiling, then there is no reason why in the contemporary scene they would not distinguish themselves in different fields of life while observing the orders of God and the Prophet. If implementing the veil and its rules is quite practicable then there is no reason why Muslim women should try to seek refuge in the practices of another alien world. In the

Prophetic era the veil of a Muslim women was a sign of the freedom that Islam had offered them and the badge of rescue and salvation from an uncivilized system. Whereas today the veiling of Muslim women is understood as being synonymous with making her a non-entity, putting a blanket ban on her activities, confining her to the four walls of home. In the first Muslim era veils were a marker of empowerment of women, whereas the contemporary veil is a sign of their deprivation. The need is to recover the veil's previous status. Veils are never out of fashion and they have the power and pragmatism to prove useful in every era, but our own all-concealing veil has no use beyond the feudal society it belongs to.

### THE OBJECTIVE OF ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Islam demands from both men and women that they contribute towards the establishment of a righteous society and it grants complete freedom to women to participate in this sacred mission as it does for men. However, it cannot be brushed aside that people who are in favor of establishing an exemplary, peaceful and virtuous society are still liable to human frailties and vulnerable to making mistakes. In order for a virtuous society to be sustained human interaction and mutual cooperation between men and women requires some basic principles to be put in place, and precautionary measures need to be taken so that rights of neither party are violated. The responsibility of upholding these is placed on both men and women, lest any loophole should allow Satan to make inroads. The regulation for meeting between a man and woman (who are eligible for marriage) is that they should do so in presence of a third person (*Bukhari* and *Muslim*). It is categorically prohibited for either sex to witness the other naked (*Muslim*). Such attire has also been disallowed that accentuates the attractiveness of the body. The Prophet Muhammad has stated "Allah's curse on such women who despite being dressed are naked". Faithful men and women have been ordered to protect their gaze from going astray (surah al-Nur). It has been emphasized that Muslim women should use coverlets whilst outside. In short, this principle has been inculcated that in social interaction between man and woman, unnatural and unhealthy desires should not be incited in such a way as to overpower either of them.

The objective of Islamic society is not to make a distinct type of veil popular nor is its aim to compartmentalize men and women in different worlds. Islam merely aims to establish caution in the interaction among men and women in order that those whose intention is to establish a virtuous society on earth should not fall prey to the vices of human error. The goal of Islamic injunctions is not to imprison women in their homes,



but to construct a society free from weaknesses and vice. Should apprehension arise of a woman attending a mosque, she can be prevented from doing so. For example, the Prophet prohibited women from attending mosques after applying scent. As far as mobility of women is concerned and the social interaction of men and women, Islam does not object to it; instead it encourages men and women working for same mission to view each other as friends and comrades.

Men and women have been encouraged to offer greetings to each other in public places, and to ask about the welfare of one another. When greeting, no distinctions have been made between relations or non-relations, strangers or acquainted men and women. Tirmidhi documented that the Prophet greeted women sitting in the mosque as well as waving his hand toward them.

For establishing a virtuous society Islam lays stress on guiding principles and expects people to adhere strictly to them. It anticipates such a society where despite the mobility of women the symbols and outcomes of piety are not weakened. It does not uphold an artificial solution where out of fear of mischief women are concealed and imprisoned. It understands that sexual inclinations can arise to varied degrees in each person. But by pinpointing the dangers, the issue can be addressed and rectified. Instead of just excluding women from social life, Islam emphasizes the mental and spiritual training of both men and women. Such was the distinctive spirit current in the society of Prophetic era.

### **ESTABLISHING A VIRTUOUS SOCIETY**

In an era like the present when Islamic society is disabled and the social and political institutions of Islam have broken down, the entire Muslim Ummah is powerless to do other than exist under an unIslamic system. But in this situation when out of fear and caution people propose locking up women in their homes, their lack of wisdom and pragmatism is lamentable. Which is worse: that we live our lives in the midst of alienation but the foundations of our faith are not threatened, or we allow a small mischief to disturb us to our core? Our whole life is marked by incorporation into a non-Islamic system. We are compelled to disobey Allah's laws day in day out, and our life is subservient to the demands of falsehood. We have been surviving for so long under such an alien system that it now appears normal. We have given up on the truth that the pathway that guarantees our salvation is the one that has reached to us through the Prophet Muhammad. What can be worse than the fact that we are living our lives oblivious to the primary Prophetic agenda? To offer sacrifices in the path of Allah and be martyred while struggling to make his religion paramount is an idea that

strikes very few of us. Instead our minds and hearts have said goodbye to what Islam really means. The need of the hour is to relinquish the ostrich approach and prepare ourselves against the greater evil. Otherwise whatever little faith we do possess will also be destroyed under this regime of falsehood.

If while looking inwards Muslim society as a whole and in particular its women become aware of a deep crisis, the reason is not, God forbid, that they are opposed to the path of Allah and his Prophet; the real cause of their apprehension is the polluted culture that has snatched away from them the role of an active woman. They are aggrieved that in the excuse of curtailing mischief, Muslim society has stopped their activism in the path of Allah. They are agonized also that for a long time their Muslim brothers have accepted an unislamic system. They are neither themselves playing any positive role in establishing a righteous system nor do they inspire their sisters to be a part of this struggle. The truth is that out of sheer despondency at contemporary Muslims, some sisters are looking towards western movements which in the garb of freedom want to snatch everything away from them. In a situation where tumultuous changes are knocking at our doors, conscious Muslim women have the responsibility to compose a new plan for living their life. It is now time to revive an active socio-religious role such as the one women enjoyed in the Prophetic era.

# Can a Muslim Woman lead Congregational Prayers?

Can a Muslim woman lead the Friday Congregation, and that too in a situation where the congregation includes many men, in addition to women? This is the vital, juridical question which is agitating the Muslim world, and on which the jurists and other influential personages of the world are engaged in putting across their views from their own individual perspectives. Shaikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi who holds special place of prestige in the Muslim world because of his erudition has strongly opposed such a move, characterizing it as a deviation from the true Islamic path. On the other hand, the Shaikh Al-Azhar and many other religious scholars do not reject or dismiss the idea of women leading congregational prayers out of hand, but rather put forward the view that the imamhood of women should be limited to all-female congregations. The ulema belonging to traditional schools of thought in Saudi Arabia and India, however, have declared it to be a sinful act. These scholars are infuriated by the fact that at a time when the Muslim world is under severe attack from external forces, these women have chosen to attack the community from within. What, after all, do they want to achieve by raising this issue at this juncture? They fear that such an ill-advised move will, in the final analysis, benefit only the enemies of Islam. And the entire community of Muslims will be thrown into utter chaos and confusion.

What is really needed is that rather than getting agitated and worked up over the issue, we must reflect over it calmly as to how best to address it. Islamically speaking, if one reflects on the question as to who is better qualified to lead a congregational prayer, the following factors will be taken into consideration: (a) a person who is superior in piety (*taqwa*); (b) one who has a better understanding of the religion and who possesses deeper insight into it; and (c) one who knows better how to recite the Qur'an, keeping its phonetic and semantic properties in mind. The gender question will not acquire primacy here, that is to say, whether the person possessing the above qualities is a man or a woman. This is because the Qur'an never endorsed any racial or gender discrimination. In the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* one does not find any corroboration of the view that being a woman by itself becomes a demerit or

disqualification, either socially or in matters of religion. This is the Qur'anic perspective as far as the question of imamhood of women is concerned. As for the question as to how the jurists think on the issue, it should be kept in mind that history is replete with instances in which they (i.e., the jurists) have declared as 'strictly forbidden' (*haram*) acts that were merely 'undesirable' (*mubah*). The basis for such injunctions was the fear that perpetuation of such 'undesirable' acts might be the cause of some mischief in the community. Take for instance, the question of women's entry into the mosque, the most basic social institution of Muslims. The history of Islam down the ages and the continuing practices by the Ummah bear witness to the fact that right from the time of the Prophet up to the contemporary times, there has been provision for women's entry into mosques, if it was considered necessary or expedient. This tradition still continues at the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's mosque in Medina. Even though some rulers and Islamic scholars in the past tried to put a ban on the circumambulation of the Ka'ba by both the sexes constituting the same congregation, but these efforts proved futile. In this context, history books even record widespread condemnation of a renowned traditionist (*muhaddith*) like A'tta. However, in places that were away from the sacred site of Hijaz, local influence prevailed over the thoughts of jurists and they restricted the role of women in society. They did this with one specific objective in mind -- that the increased independence of women and their unrestricted entry into the mosque might not cause further dissensions and conflict in the already decadent Muslim society. If the moral or spiritual condition of Muslim men was low and pitiable, then the logical thing was to strive for its correction and improvement. On the contrary, it so happened that women were penalised for it and they were ejected from such central sites as the mosque.

The story did not end here. In the age of decadence when a general atmosphere of gloom and despair prevailed in the Muslim society, to preserve the religion in its true form, it was felt necessary that women should be subjected to additional modes of hijab in addition to the compulsory veiling. In consequence, exposure of palm and face which was considered permissible in the early era of Islam, and many arguments from books of tradition and history can be adduced in support of this even today, was declared to be impermissible. Even though the exposure of face is still an unresolved issue among the Muslim scholars, it cannot be denied, however, that as a result of the widespread public perception that veiling the face is the most appropriate and cautious step for preserving the Faith, a vast segment of the Muslim community began to take it to be the correct interpretation of the Faith. The same attitude of caution is at work here, that is, even after covering the entire body, if the face remained exposed, it would

not be possible to stop mischief from taking place in the society that was already on the path of decadence. To make matters worse, in some circles one finds the idea fairly common that it is forbidden for strangers to even hear the voice of women. In some Muslim societies, it is still considered against the Islamic values to reveal the name of women or introduce them to others. Muslim women suffered most grievously because of this cautionary philosophy. Its perpetuation for centuries has rendered them faceless, nameless and without any voice. She had to forgo her social and religious role as a Muslim woman. While those who had taken up the project of arresting the process of decadence in the Muslim community concentrated all their efforts on how to control Muslim women, and correcting the ways of men disappeared from their programme of action. Even today, those who want to reject the social, political and religious leadership of women simply because they think that this will open floodgates of dissensions and conflicts in the community are merely following the path of the ancestors that had, in fact, speeded up the process of decadence in the community.

The core of Islamic belief lies in self-surrender, and this self-surrender is demanded of men as much as of women. We should not have the slightest reservation in admitting the fact that Allah and His Prophet know much better (than us) which particular thing can cause mischief in the society and which particular act or practice will help maintain peace and a kind of equilibrium. If Allah had allowed the Muslim women the right to participate in the social and religious life in the mosque, and if the Prophet endorsed and maintained it during his lifetime, then we do not have the right to deprive women of this right after so many centuries on the basis of our inferior understanding of the tenets of Faith. Even an ordinary student of Islamic history knows that it was usual for women during the Prophet's time to move about freely, their names and faces were known to people, and that they conducted business and trade. During the period of the Pious Caliphs, their advice was sought on political matters. A nondescript, flat-nosed woman thought it her duty, and could take the liberty, to reprimand Caliph Omer in public on what she considered an error in his interpretation during a congregational address. If we keep in mind this environment of comparative openness in the initial stages of Islam then the idea of a woman leading a congregational prayer does not seem to be such an astonishing one. Dr Hamidullah, in his *Khutbate Bahawalpur*, has mentioned two such instances of women leading congregational prayers in the first century of Islam. Even if these instances were not recorded in books of history, we should not have much difficulty in appreciating the fact that the benchmark of piety (*taqwa*) that Islam has made mandatory for all those who want to be spiritually elevated, leaves no scope for discrimination on the basis of

race, region, complexion or gender. The Qur'an has made it abundantly clear that the good acts of a person cannot be dismissed or undervalued simply because he belongs to a particular group or sex. The Qur'anic verse –

﴿يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾ [49:13]

promises every human being that none of his good actions will be lost. Further, the verse –

﴿وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ﴾ [6:164]

states that every person will have to face the consequences of his actions. And that – كل - i.e., every person will be rewarded according to his deserts, and all external identities will be useless. Moreover, when both for men and women the same principle of صبغة الله ('Take the colour of Allah') is to be applied, how can a man offer only his 'manhood' to claim superiority over a woman who is superior to him in terms of her good practice and piety? The Qur'an announced destruction for such a mighty monarch as the Pharaoh, and such a powerful man as Abu Lahab. On the other hand, it announced good tidings for the entire people of Saba under the leadership of the truth-loving queen of Saba. In other words, all distinctions of sex, color, race, region that human beings inherit by birth have been declared to be invalid, and it was made crystal clear that what is dear to Allah is one's good actions or practices (*amal-e-saalih*). This is the only quality that will determine the position of Muslims in the Islamic society. The Qur'an goes so far as to exhort that even good people from other communities should be treated with respect, and that their good actions, too, would not go waste. We are adherents of the Book that repeatedly, and at many places, affirms that all unnatural distinctions of color, race, gender, territory, north and south, Arab and non-Arab, have been rendered invalid. What will come to one's rescue on the Day of Judgment, when Allah Himself will decide what is genuine and what is fake, are one's good actions and practices. Prior to this, no responsible or God-fearing person can dare to declare someone to be a sinner or a denizen of hell, because Allah has reserved this decision for that Day.

From the stage of a totally disempowered entity (بأي ذنب قتلت) to the stage of religious and political leadership, women have traveled a long way. The movement for the restoration of human dignity initiated by the Prophet had had far reaching consequences for people living in distant corners of the world. Not only have the Muslims been benefited from the good results yielded by this movement but that other

disadvantaged sections of the society belonging to other religions too benefited from them. Families suffering under the weight of usury for generations heaved a sigh of relief; the institution of slavery slowly disappeared from the face of the earth. Similarly, the barbarous tradition of keeping women enslaved to men came to an end. The revolutionary message of the assertion that 'believing men and women are helpers of one another'

[9:71] ﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ﴾

ignited the idea that in the path of total surrender to Allah both men and women would be equal partners.

The foundation of revolution that was laid at the time of the Prophet did not yield all its results immediately, or during the life of the Prophet. Had it been so, then the final Prophet and the history of the succeeding ages would have lost much of their importance. Those who think that the results that were not visible during the Prophet's lifetime should not have come to light in the later ages, or those who insist on the idea that the acts not performed during the Prophet's time and performed in the later ages should be taken as signs of the approaching doomsday, are not really aware of the significance of the concept of the last Prophet, and do not understand the real import of the eternal nature of the Qur'an. If it were not so, then what answer can they possibly have to the question that the way the Qur'an exhorts the followers of Islam to treat slaves cannot be implemented in the present day context as the old institution of slavery is no longer there? How can we deny the fact which is crystal clear that the inevitable consequence of the Qur'anic exhortations regarding compassionate treatment of slaves and freeing them from bondage was the gradual disappearance of this institution? In other words, these exhortations signaled the beginning of a great social revolution, not its end. Their real impact could be seen not at the moment of revelation or the first generation but many years later. Similarly, after reading instructions in the Qur'an regarding *zakah* no one draws the conclusion that the Qur'an intends to perpetuate poverty, i.e., a section of the people in society must remain poor so that rich people can show kindness towards them and thus discharge their duties. The case of the evolutionary status of women is somewhat similar to this. During the Prophet's time women were taken to be equal to men and they were accorded social roles. One inevitable consequence of this was that in the coming years women would claim their position of dignity and prominence in society on the basis of their knowledge and piety. The foundation that Islam laid for the empowerment of women had had far-reaching results, even outside Muslim societies. The movement for women's

emancipation in the west, their participation in social and political processes, right to express their individual opinions, guarantee for individual freedom etc. did not come to them out of the blue one fine morning. Behind them, too, can be seen the impact of the revolution initiated by the Prophet that had reached the west through cultural exchanges spanning over centuries. Of course, because of indifference to the message of the Divine Revelation, the west is now a victim of the excesses of individual freedom.

Human society is always in a constant process of evolution. The movement for human rights that the Prophet had started in Mecca was, in fact, unstoppable. In the march of human history, those whose gaze cannot see beyond Magna Carta or those who think that human history was like a stagnant pool before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights give evidence of their own ignorance only. Today, all the concerns that are being voiced for preserving human rights and dignity, be it about saving the earth from nuclear destruction, saving the environment, concerns about the extinction of not only human beings but some endangered species of animals, air pollution, maintaining the natural warmth of oceans etc, could be traced back to the teachings of the Prophet. In the Muslim society today, if the women have a feeling that they have been pushed to the margins in the patriarchal system, and in the effort to restore their rightful position muster up enough courage to claim such positions as leading congregational prayers, it cannot be considered to be an entirely alien thought in the light of the past history of Islam. The need of the hour is that instead of behaving like strangers to our own cultural heritage, we should see the issue in a larger perspective. In the context of any human practice, not excepting the attitude characterized by the instruction 'compete with each other in good acts and try to take precedence in it' (فاستبقوا الخيرات), people might commit excesses, but they need not alarm us as these can always be corrected. However, if we simply reject such efforts by saying that it is a plot hatched by the enemies of Islam or that it is an evil thought emanating from the over-active imagination of misguided Muslims, then we will not be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the issue.

It is true that in the history of Islam spanning over fourteen centuries, if we leave out some exceptional occasions, there has been no continuing tradition of having women as imams leading congregational prayers. However, alongside this fact it cannot be denied too that Muslim men had shown very little reservations about accepting women as jurisprudents, thinkers or teachers. If we abide by the principle that all the impact of the Islamic movement was not manifested during the Prophet's time, and that some of its impact manifested itself in succeeding years and ages too, and that the

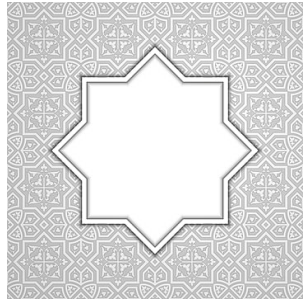


dream of establishing a global society based on the teachings of the Prophet is yet to come about, and this is precisely the *raison d'être* for the last Prophet and his followers, then a significant transformation would take place in our way of thinking. And then, rather than branding the issue of women's claim to imamah as a mischief and a sign of the approaching doomsday, we will try to assess it in the light of insights derived from the Qur'an. We feel that those who consider women's claim for imamat as destructive of the Faith do not have the courage to assess the issue in the light of the Qur'an or do not feel the necessity to do so. For them the interpretation made by the ancients and the edicts issued by them constitute the final verdict on every issue, so much so that they consider any debate on such verdicts to be an exercise in mischief-mongering. Such an attitude cannot be supported as a principled stand simply because for a futuristic religion like Islam, a religion that has to lead mankind till the Last Hour should not be made subservient to the interpretation by some scholars of the past. If we do so, it will be tantamount to suspending the message of the Divine Revelation and its main objectives. Unfortunately, for a long time, it has become customary for Muslims to see the Qur'an simply as a book of benedictions rather than one of reflection and contemplation. We are not ready to accept the fact that our ancient predecessors, too, were human beings like us, and were liable to error in their readings and interpretation of the divine verses, in their efforts to derive commandments and in their efforts to correlate contending traditions, and in their efforts to decide things through intuition or expediency. We are not compelled to carry on the burden of their mistakes of omission and commission. Aren't our own mistakes cause enough for worry for ourselves, than that we should consider it necessary to carry on the burden of mistakes left by our predecessors? The need of the hour is that instead of operating within the axis of the old jurisprudence, and fretting and fuming over the problem, we must try to resolve this delicate, sensitive and extremely important issue in the light of Islam's evolutionary journey through fourteen centuries. However, for the new thinkers it will be necessary that just as they should adopt a skeptical attitude towards the old system of jurisprudence and the contemporary social and political impact on it, they must also refuse, as far as possible, to accept the influences exerted by current social and political trends and thoughts.



SECTION IX

# Interfaith Understanding



# Calling for a New Dialogue between Islam and Christianity

﴿ وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا  
بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَخَنَ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴾

*And argue not with the People of the Book, unless it be in a polite way, except with those who do wrong; and say (to them): We believe in what has been sent down to us as also what has been sent down to you; for our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit [29:46].*

Royal Highnesses, Excellencies and Holinesses, Ladies and Gentlemen!

As a Muslim I am rather perplexed to enter into any formal dialogue with Christians. For a Muslim-Christian dialogue entails that the representatives of Muhammad and of Jesus find themselves on the opposing sides of the table, each party pleading the case of his spiritual mentor. Put simply, we begin with the assumption that Muhammad and Jesus belong to two different and opposing camps. As a Muslim who believes both in Jesus and Muhammad, one and at the same time, and who belongs to both the camps, it is not possible for me to speak for Muhammad alone and yet remain a Muslim. Today, when I stand here presumably to represent the Muslim side, I want to make it clear that representing the Muslim side does not mean that I have forsaken Jesus or withdrawn my claim on him who is integral to my faith. The Qur'an enjoins upon us not to differentiate or give preference to one prophet over the other – لا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ [2:136, 3:84].

Not doubt God honored each of them in a specific manner;

تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ مِّنْهُمْ مَّن كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٍ ۗ [2:253]

To some God chose to speak, one was called the Word of God and yet another was honored to be the seal of the prophets. However, we Muslims who consider ourselves as *Ummah Muslimah* or nation of submitters, our religious identity stems from the collective identity of all the prophets of God. In fact the prophet Muhammad came to

establish no new Ummah but to revive the religion of Abraham – مَلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمُّكُمْ – المُسْلِمِينَ – who was a great submitter, a Muslim per se. In the Qur'an we come across a beautiful Abrahamic prayer wherein he prays: 'O Lord make me a submitter, a Muslim and raise from among our children a nation of submitters unto you' – امة مسلمة لك. And when Jacob was on his deathbed he asked his sons whom would they worship after him? They affirmed: 'we will worship thy God and the God of your fathers – of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac – the only one God whom we have submitted ourselves to' [2:133]. In the Qur'anic worldview, the term Ummah Muslima or the Muslim nation encompasses all the prophets and their rightly guided followers, the nations of Abraham, of Jacob and Moses and of Jesus and Muhammad. It is altogether a different story that today we Muslims appear to have patented the word Muslim which simply means submission per se. Having been placed in the same camp and given a common ideological identity to all those who follow Abraham and his rightly guided progeny, isn't it a misnomer to call a Christian-Muslim encounter a dialogue?

In the heyday of Islam when the Prophet Muhammad lived amongst us, we never considered the Jews and the Christians as the religious other. Instead, they were taken as our natural allies, as People of the Book while the non-believing Meccans despite their kinship to the Prophet and his followers were dubbed as *kuffar*, the religious other. In surah Haj verse 40 one is astonished to find that monasteries, churches and synagogues, are placed at par with the mosques, and are mentioned in the same breath, wherein together, we are told God's name is commemorated in abundance:

﴿وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ هَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا﴾ [22:40]

This sense of religious pluralism that pervaded early Islam helped flourish a full-fledged religious life of other believing nations under Islam. History records the Prophet's treaty with the Christians of Najran which guaranteed the protection of their religious life and preservation of religious institutions. And when Muaz was sent to Yemen the Prophet instructed him not to disrupt the religious life of the Jews. In early Islam, socializing with the People of the Book was encouraged as the Qur'an openly declared their food lawful for Muslims and Muslim food lawful for them. Muslims were even allowed to enter into marital relations with the Jewish and Christian girls. The Christians under early Islam were, so to speak, a loving and affectionate nation enjoying the general goodwill of the Muslim people, as endorsed by the Qur'an:

﴿وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْقَرَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرِيُّ﴾ [5:82]

“and you will find the nearest in love to the believers (Muslims) those who say: ‘We are Christians.’”

This then is the ideological stance and historical background of any future Christian-Muslim dialogue. Had there been no crusades, no colonialism and no war on terror which many Muslims view as a modern-day crusade, I’m sure, the world would have been much a better place today and the two ideologically allied nations would not have needed any dialogue to mend their strained relations. But the unfortunate incidents have cast their legacy, firstly, impacting historiography on both sides, secondly, severely damaging the psychological self, and finally giving birth to new terminologies like Islamophobia and Islamic terrorism. We therefore are left with no option but to call for a new and an effective dialogue that may hold promise of delivering our troubled world from the present impasse.

In 1965 when Vatican II declared that salvation outside the Church was possible and the pontifical council was entrusted to engage other believing nations in a dialogue, Muslims little realized then the importance of this revolutionary step. The reason may be, for many centuries Muslims too had virtually closed the door of salvation on other believing nations. Their ulema had told them that all such verses that called for forging alliance with the People of the Book or give glad tidings to the God-fearing submitters among the Majians, the Jews and the Christians ( لا خوف عليهم ) were abrogated and hence not applicable to them anymore. Instead of behaving as leader of the believing nations they mistakenly cast themselves as Ummah Muhammadiya. Until very recently they lived confined to the *darul-Islam* (the abode of Islam), a psychological boundary and a political paradigm that they fashioned in the days of military conflict and which has no basis whatsoever in the Qur’an. Today when owing to the communication revolution boundaries of all sorts are constantly being trampled, when incidents in one country affects other nations far beyond its borders, when the yoke of corporate capitalism has left almost no space for a free and alternative living and when it has become clear, more than ever before, that large-scale deforesting in third world countries amounts to depriving us of the ‘lungs of the world’, concerned individuals in all civilizations are realizing that without taking everybody on board the Noah’s Arc probably could not set on sailing.

From Vatican II nostra proclamation to the post-9/11 anti-war demonstrations in the bastions of the Christian west, Christian-Muslim understanding has come a long way. The anti-war mammoth rallies in Europe and America demonstrated to Muslims, probably for the first time in history, that even among secularized Christians they can find allies against oppression and injustice. The anti-war demonstration in western

capitals especially in London in which I personally participated and which brought the enlightened activists of the two communities together was a hope-giving phenomenon. Without any theological hairsplitting or finding a common religious ground we achieved what otherwise probably would not have been possible.

This is not to downplay the importance of theological engagement but simply to assert that theological arguments should not be taken as the crux of any Christian-Muslim dialogue. It can only be one of the possible levels on which dialogues have to take place though it immediately comes to our mind. In recent years, among the many theological formulations on the horizon, probably by far the most sophisticated and consistent initiative on the Muslim side has been the common-word initiative by an Amman based Foundation. Assuming that everything in Islam and Christianity hangs around the two basic precepts, the love of God and love of neighbor, this document is a passionate search to find common religious grounds. But despite substantial endorsement by Muslim ulema and policymakers and a good press this document received in the West, so far it has been a non-starter. To me, it appears more an exercise in diplomacy than any frank dialogue. It is not only guilty of casting Islam in a Christian dye by employing Christian terminologies it also avoids difficult questions that have been bones of contention between the two communities. Should we allow the building of new Churches in Muslim lands? What does it mean to have freedom to change one's religious alliances? Such questions are natural corollary to any theological engagement.

Since Hans Kung publicized from the platform of the Parliament of World's Religions the idea that there can be no peace without peace among religions, other possible and equally important levels of dialogues have been pushed to the background. We should not lose sight of the fact that today, unlike the medieval age, Christianity is not a fixed set of dogmas and no Nicene Creed binds the adherents of Christianity together. In a post-Christian environment where the Church fathers command little influence, the elitist theological engagements can bear little fruit. I'm afraid theological and *fiqhi* hairsplitting on both sides would keep them entangled for many years to come. I therefore plead that the dialogue must move on simultaneously to the other forums. Or, alternatively, high-level theological dialogues may incorporate public intellectuals, social scientists, natural scientists and other industrial leaders on both sides. This will not only save us from unnecessary entanglement but will also increase the efficacy of any such engagements manifold.

Honesty and frankness apart, the proponents of a new Muslim-Christian dialogue must be clear about the methodological issues involved. For us, Islam as a message is



not negotiable though open to further interpretation, but Islam as a history is always open to any evaluation and criticism. I do not know if the Christian ulema would be willing to have the same attitude to Vatican councils or the councils that once canonized the Nicene Creed. To me, Jesus like Muhammad is not negotiable. But what comes after them, the human element in the making of Islam and Christianity should be open to critical evaluation.

A new dialogue will pose a major intellectual challenge to the proponents of both religions. Before finding a common word between the two they need to find a common word or a founding document on which each community broadly agrees. Probably, Qur'an on the one side and Jesus' words as recorded in the gospels can serve as a possible alternative.

Taking the dialogue to this level needs building unshakable trust on both sides. Often seen out of context, some verses in the Qur'an such as *Jizya* verse or لا تتخذوا اليهود والنصارى أولياء etc have appeared to some Christians as 'troubling'. There is no need to be apologetic about them or hide them in the closet. We must accept each other as we are, with all our intellectual and religious moorings. There is nothing in the Qur'an that makes conversion to another religion punishable by death or that prohibits building of Christian churches in Muslim countries. These are basically administrative issues that have to take into account public sensitivity and security issues attached to them. The juridical rulings of the past *fuqaha* are always open to debate. But this kind of debate requires a general atmosphere of trust and goodwill. Today, when Christianity has yet to shed its colonial moorings, when the war on terror is perceived by many as modern-day crusade, as a war against Islam and as a Christian attempt to grab energy resources in Muslim lands, when predominantly 'Christian' bullets are continuously taking innocent lives in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, when publishing the cartoons demonizing the prophet Muhammad has become a litmus test to free-speech, even well-intentioned debates on such sensitive issues and by well-meaning individuals can only create further suspicion and distrust.

Let us first build trust. We must start reaping the trust and good-will now and move on to address other immediate concerns on which our common survival and survival of the world depends. Globalization's leap in the wrong direction has resulted in the mad burning of extra-oil creating alarming energy crises, speculative prices of fossil fuels, ecological imbalance, the ever-widening divide between the poor and the rich and eventually turning our only planet into a mere theater of mega-corporations. A free space where the individual can live an alternative life beyond the tax-net and is not coerced to pay for mad defense spending and development has vanished. The

capitalist control of the media and now to a great extent of the university system is indicative of the fact that things have become rotten to the core. The world needs a major shake-up. The death of democracy has resulted in plutocracy and there are multifarious indications that the capitalist system despite its worldwide popularity is crumbling. It is for the believing nations to bury their differences in the greater interest of humanity and come out with viable alternatives.

Confronted as we are today with a gigantic crises, no single nation on her own can turn the tide. It is incumbent on all the inhabitants of the planet, no matter which religious tradition he or she comes from, to contribute his maximum share in the great rescue mission of humanity.

# Can Islam Rescue the West?

The sun has finally set in the West. It seems as if the Enlightenment is over. The long cherished western ideals of liberty, freedom and Human rights that illuminated our horizon once the West came to assume global leadership and monopolize intellectual heritage, are greatly threatened today in the very bastions of western civilization. As a concept and a civilization the West is in the process of dying. Long before Spengler cast his doubts about the future of the Faustian civilization, the West has been on a slippery slope; the seeds of her undoing lay in the Enlightenment itself. The Enlightenment had produced not only the Holocaust and the Gulag, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have pointed out, it has also been responsible for a value-free secularity, a perpetual source of spiritual crisis and political conflicts. Some one third of Europe's population perished in the Great Wars, yet the emergence of the New World of America had given some enough hope that the day was not far when humanity would achieve its ultimate utopia. Paine, Jefferson and Madison were seen as upholders of prophetic ideals not only in the Humanistic Christian context but their words inspired many people beyond American borders. But as it turned out the great American Dream has turned out today into a cruel nightmare for most of the inhabitants of this planet. The very presence of the caged-world of Guantanamo and secret detention facilities worldwide, and for so long, are indicative of the fact that the West as a 'beacon of hope' is dead. This phenomenon we term as post-Western.

We Muslims had always had a love-hate relation with the West. Having been staunchly critical of western secularity we always looked at it as an epitome of sexual anarchy yet at the same time we lived in great awe of western technology and the western social ideals of individual freedom and liberty. For a number of decades it has also been a place of refuge for many Islamists who were hounded by the oppressive regimes in their own homelands. By some sarcastically dubbed as *Londonistan*, the West, no doubt, for many of us was an alternative world whose death could be mourned not by westerners alone but by all those who long to live under a free-sky.

Surprisingly enough, the notion of the death of the West has not created much of an uproar in the high echelons of western society. From Oswald Spengler to Samuel Huntington to Francis Fukuyama to David Coleman and Patrick Buchanan there is a

marked western slant that probably hinders an honest analysis of where the West has gone wrong. Including Spengler, who although he does not look at other great civilizations as prelude to western civilization, they are in general, wary of other civilizational models and hence instead of coming up with any cure they end up with a mere frightening diagnosis or at best some vague murmurings about the end of history itself. For Fukuyama and other intellectuals of his ilk who share a linear view of history it is difficult to believe that nations other than western may have their own dreams and ideals. The eventual triumph of capitalist democracy in some parts of the world does not necessarily mean that other nations too long for this model or it is the ultimate destination of History. Western democracy might be one of the best models that humans have invented during the last few centuries, nevertheless, we have moved beyond democratic times and what we encounter today is a post-democratic era where democracy only means choosing from among divergent evils. In recent years, western streets have witnessed a fierce battle between popular democracy and coercive democracy, the former represented by anti-war protesters and the latter by war-mongering ruling elite. Yet despite the utter helplessness (for lack of an alternative) that the individual experiences in coercive democracies if someone claims that 'we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order' and even goes on to threaten us of 'the possibility that History itself might be at an end' (Fukuyama, 1992:5), we can only feel pity for this self-congratulating establishment intellectual.

It is not that History has come to a full circle but the fact is that the Faustian-American civilization fast is losing its edge. With the emergence of new economic power houses in Asia, it is very likely that in the coming years the world capital will be moving to Beijing and New Delhi. That great western catastrophe of 'treason to technics', about which Spengler had warned as early as in 1931, is taking place now. Though generally ignored by establishment intellectuals, Spengler's prognosis looks increasingly accurate today:

The countless hands of the colored races – at least as clever, and far less demanding – will shatter the economic organization of the whites at its foundation. The accustomed luxury of the white worker, in contrast to that of the coolie, will be his doom. The labor of the white is itself becoming superfluous.... The centre of gravity of production is steadily shifting away from them, especially given that even the colored races' respect for the whites came to an end with the [First] World War. This is the real and final basis of the unemployment that

prevails in the white countries. It is no mere crisis, but the beginning of a catastrophe ...

(*Der Mensch und die Technik*, 1931: 86)

The situation however is much more frightening than what Spengler had envisaged. Let us briefly mention here some of the major constituents that make up what we generally term as 'the West' and which in my opinion is on the verge of extinction.

a.) Christianity that once dominated the social, political and intellectual life of the West is considered today as an old-fashioned carry-over. Ever since Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) published his book *Das Wesen des Christentums* it became difficult for a dominant number of thinking people to believe in a testament that was familiar with only three continents and that presupposed a static view of the universe centred on earth. Today despite a vague linkage to the Christian past the general atmosphere in the West bears testimony to the fact that something very essential has moved out. Not only the Churches wear a deserted look but the very 'being' has moved out of their lives. This we uncomfortably term as post-Christian.

b.) Next comes what the demographers would call 'depopulation of the West'. In 1960 people of European origin constituted some one-fourth of the global population which according to a UN projection will be reduced to one-tenth by the year 2050. The white race is on a steep decline and there is every indication that it is fading away. In his seminal polemical work *The Death of the West* Buchanan argues that while the world population has almost doubled in last 40 years, the European people including the Australians, the Americans and Canadians have stopped producing and have begun to stagnate. If the trend goes on some '23 million Germans will have disappeared' thus reducing their number to 59 million from today's 82 million. In 2000, some 47 European nations, from Iceland to Russia, together constituted 728 million which is expected to come crashing to 600 million by the mid century. David Coleman is also of the opinion that by mid century 30 percent of Dutch, 24 percent of Germans and 36 percent Brits will be of foreign origin. Huntington has voiced a similar fear that by 2050 one-fourth of the US population will be Hispanic (*Foreign Policy*, 2004). Not only the ethnic composition of the West is changing but unassimilated minorities are redefining the entire gamut of values that once gave the West an identity and a name. Can the non-white population that is expected to dominate the US for example by mid century be truly representative Westerners? If so probably we have to redefine the traditional notion of the West. A reversal in population trend is highly unlikely not simply because of the social security that makes it irrelevant to invest in the children for old-age care but more because of the socio-economic factors that leave little room

for raising a family. The contraceptive pills that they so proudly invented and propagated the world over during the last two/three generations have rebounded on them as the ultimate suicidal pill for the white race.

c.) As stated earlier, democracy, the most strongly held belief of western civilization lies in tatters not simply because of the promulgation of US Patriot Act and the British Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act but because of the control of mass media by a few mega corporations that orchestrate our perception and thinking; FANG (Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google). The complete control of mega corporations over the world system and their capitalist sister concerns have made political leadership impotent for any future change. Free market of ideas that John Stuart Mill advocated for a healthy democratic society is not possible in a world where smaller and local newspapers have been swallowed by media tycoons. Even the publishing industry is brutally controlled by a few giants and chain of bookstores and it remains up to them to decide which book should be marked as best-seller. In a world of media blitz the individual is totally blind struggling to make sense what it means to live in a post-democratic era where proponents of Liberal Democracy, through their draconian measures, are out to destroy democracy in order to safeguard its future.

d.) Technology and capital are moving to the third world countries at a speed never imagined before. New York stock exchange might still be the largest in turnover and Americans might still consume a whopping 700 billion year but these are illusory figures with regard to American prosperity. If the Americans are not producing that much it simply amounts to selling their market to the Asians. The rise of India and China – mega-corporate's favorite destinations, is at the expense of the West and especially America which has no other alternative but to outsource even its service sectors to Asia. The internet is siphoning off white collar jobs from the West and the cheap technical labor is forcing major technical giants to set-up their next-generation industries in India and China. What does this transformation of economy imply for the Smithian model of free-trade? If a country exports its productive capability and if services are outsourced at the other end of the phone for cheap skilled labor, what will it be trading in the future, and for how long? With China alone US has a trade deficit of about \$ 125 billion and it is dishing out some \$ 1.5 billion a day from its national wealth to meet its outsourced expenditure. Economists have been raising the alarm that the US and so also the EU countries are on a fast track to becoming Third World countries. If production and services are shifted to far off lands one wonders what people would be doing in Manhattan sky-scrappers and Chicago high-rise buildings? To quote Paul Roberts, 'by 2024 the US will be a has-been country'.

e.) Like democracy, people are usually wary of expressing even little doubts about the future of capitalism. They believe that there is no viable alternative to capitalism especially when they see that the socialist system has collapsed, long-time socialists the world over have compromised with capitalist doctrines and despite much hoo-ha of Islamic revival an alternative to modern day capitalism has yet to emerge in the world of Islam. But simply because everybody is doing some sort of capitalism does not mean that capitalism is not questionable and there is no threat to its future. In fact the major threat to capitalism is from capitalism itself on account of it being unsustainable. When Marx was writing his critique of the system of 'pure capital' it was before it became fully visible as those were not the days of corporate capitalism. Today, for the first time in human history corporate capitalism is defining who we are, and how we should think and live on this planet. Soulless and pleasure-awry consumers as we have become, we humans are mere pawns in the hands of mega-corporations. Billionaires turned philanthropists who are setting up new trusts and foundations aim at controlling what little room is left for independent thinking. The more they accumulate wealth the more power they command. As mega-corporations have no home countries, it is beyond any Hugo Chavez or Ahmadinejad to confront them. Is really the monster of capitalism untameable? Apparently yes, because there is no equally powerful competitor or alternative to it. But capitalism is self-destructive; it is like the creature that eats her own body for short-term survival. Built on the idea of producing more and yet more it cannot go on and on for ever. Our planet is being used up and we cannot indefinitely ignore global warming, energy crisis, water crisis and all that has a direct bearing on ecological imbalance. An alternative may not be visible as yet, but I'm sure that capitalism in the present form is simply unsustainable.

This then is the story of a dying civilization. The modern American-led West which, for over a century appeared to many of us as a place of refuge was not created on any divine fiat but on centuries of accumulated wisdom that promised Man right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Despite our fundamental differences with western ideologies we cannot afford simply to watch our home away from home, disappear.

The crisis of the western people, of the white race, is as much our concern as theirs. If the white race, or any other race for that matter, shrinks or gets annihilated, it will disturb the very equilibrium that sustains cosmic order. It is part of the divine scheme to raise nations and tribes, blacks and whites, males and females. And God has endowed each geographical entity with something very special. *Ummate wast* or the just Ummah as we Muslims claim to be, we are supposed to have a holistic approach to

the issues that confront humanity today. If the western hemisphere sinks it will have dire consequences for us.

Can Islam rescue the West, then? To say yes would simply be an expression of one's dogmatic position given the plight of Muslims who are the prime target of the war on terror and whose entire energy is being consumed in defending their psychological self. Secondly, Muslim ulema and intellectuals have traditionally been trained to think in the so called *dar* paradigm which saw the world always divided into two opposing camps; the *darul-Islam* and the *darul-Kufr*. As most of them were also *Qadis* or held important positions in the government, they had little time to worry about what went beyond Islamic borders. Those were the days when living in isolation was possible, if not desirable. Those trained in the traditional paradigm of 'us' versus 'them' would certainly find it difficult to extend the Islamic mission for the general welfare of the western people. Yet I'm very optimistic as I see some very significant changes taking place for the first time in Muslim history. The rationale of conceding to the four established schools of *fiqh* as the given is openly being questioned and so is the supposed sanctity of some of the past *fiqhi* judgements. The House of Islam is in the throes of an intellectual revolution.

Then there is a new generation of Muslim intellectuals born and bred in the West. Exposed to western discourses as they are, they feel a dire need to re-open scores of Islamic issues that have been held for so long as sacrosanct. They may be guilty of working within the traditional *fiqhi* paradigm, nevertheless, they have produced some remarkable apologia in beautiful prose that serves as a bridge between the western and Islamic worlds. What attracts the West in these writings is probably a clarion call to all Muslims to fully participate, rather integrate, in western societies as full-fledged western citizens. Both the proponents of integration and their Western friends believe in their naivety that injecting some fresh Islamic blood into western societies will redeem the West of its agonizing boredom and tattered spirituality. In my opinion, this is too much to expect from a religious minority which as a nation has yet to realize its full ideological worth in a western setting. This mode of thinking is also flawed on two counts; it does not take into account the magnitude of western crises which are basically civilizational and not merely spiritual; secondly, assigning a purely spiritual role to Islam is tantamount to reducing the last prophetic mission into a set of mere ethical dogma. A civilization where things are falling apart; where God is pushed to the margin; where sex without children is projected as Man's ultimate freedom; where democracy has been taken hostage by the wealthy few; where uncontrollable corporate greed for cheap Third World labor has deprived millions of western people of lucrative



jobs and where carrying corporate capitalism any further means the wholesale destruction of earth – one wonders how merely integrating a group of ethical Muslims to this dying civilization can change the course of events.

The crisis of the West is acute and needs immediate attention. The western people are realizing fast that it is dangerous to ride on the same old world and many of them are desperate to get off. But there is no readily available alternative to the capitalist world system which the Muslim world itself has become an appendage to. The future depends not on Islamic evangelism, or any other evangelism for that matter, as many of us would like to believe, but on Islamic intellectualism, on our rediscovery of the great prophetic mission.

# Reconstructing the *Ummah Muslimah*: the Legacy of Abraham

Islam is not an identity that any group can claim as its sole patent, rather, it is an attitude of willing and unconditional submission to God, a door open for all those seeking solace in the oneness of God. This call for willing submission, expressed throughout history by the true prophets of God and their rightful followers, has to be carried forward by the Muslims of our time. However, this does not imply that submitters in other prophetic traditions will be denied a role in this modern day venture. A movement calling for world revolution, for establishing a global family comprising of the children of one God cannot afford to shut its door on the submitters found in other traditions.

No objective reading of the Qur'an can miss the dominant theme that all the prophets of God, from Abraham to Muhammad or before them, were calling people to worship one God, to embrace the life example of submitters, the Muslim *haneef*. No wonder then that the Qur'an makes it a precondition of faith to believe in all the prophets as one and at one and the same time. The believers are asked to look at the prophets not as the founders of a specific Ummah but as upholders of the same divine mission: لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ. In the divine scheme they are inseparable; together they constitute a galaxy of divinely inspired leaders of humanity. They are not to be understood in isolation. The Qur'an makes it an inseparable part of the Muslim faith to believe in all the earlier prophets and what has come down to us through them. The remnants of the earlier prophetic communities, we are told, are our natural allies. Since Muhammad has not brought a new message rather he came to revive the Abrahamic religion, believers are encouraged to find in him the convergence of the entire prophetic tradition.

Muhammad founded no new Ummah. Instead, far from a new identity or a name, the new believers were asked to shun every pseudo-religious identity, be it Jewish or Christian. All those claiming to be the true inheritors of Abrahamic heritage from among the Jews and Christians or who were adamant on converting people to their bandwagon were told in clear terms that there was no goodness attached to mere

labels. Far from being a Jew or a Christian, Abraham was a submitter per se. Hence all those willing to submit to one Lord must follow his example [2:135]. Had Muhammad and his followers taken a new identity as opposed to the Jewish or Christian ones this move would certainly have undermined his position as the prophet to all humanity. As opposed to those calling for conversion to the Jewish or Christian fold كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى the new believers had to stick to the Abrahamic fold: 'the true religion of Abraham who worshiped no God other than Him' [6:161]. Contrary to the Jews and Christians who attached so much importance to their religious tags, the new believers were to march through history tag-free. The Qur'anic invitation of كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ of urging people to be a God-based Ummah or taking the color of God, صبغة الله was to drive home the same point that no prophet ever in history came to establish his own cult or invited people to submit to his own self. The Qur'an tells us, time and again, that all the prophets, despite their geographical and temporal difference, in essence had preached the same message [3:68]. And since Muhammad represents the essence of Abrahamic tradition where else would one find a model to emulate? [3:68].

The Muhammad thus projected in the Qur'an is no cult leader. He is a global prophet; a Warner to all كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا and a blessing for all mankind رحمة للعالمين. In the early era of Islam one even does not hear of the term *Ummah Muhammadiya* in the same way as in the heyday of earlier prophetic communities a cultic identity was attached to the Jew, the Christian or the Buddhist. It took centuries for these personality-based identities to evolve. All the true prophets of God did their best to connect people to one God, to raise a just society centered around God alone لا شريك له and to unite people according to the *tawhidi* paradigm as children of one God. The prophet is no ordinary seer; he is endowed with a cosmic knowledge and a meta-cosmic vision الكتاب والحكمة It is not expected of him to indulge in cult formation or call people to worship his own cult ' كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي ' whereas he is assigned to call people to worship one God or identify themselves as none but His slaves alone كُونُوا رَبَّانِيِّينَ [3:79]. Like the submitters of old the new believing community too, we are told, were to accept all the prophets as a pre-condition to their faith. They would not even prefer one prophet over the other [3:84].

Revival of a universal *Ummah* based on God alone was no ordinary vision; the rallying cry for becoming *rabbani* or a general invitation for plugging into the Divine Source created an extra-ordinary amount of energy and ecstasy. As long as the new believers remained conscious of their *rabbani* identity they looked at themselves as a convergence of the great prophetic tradition. They were like an open door wherein all souls seeking solace would find refuge. This extraordinary emphasis on God-based

identity gave the new believers an ideological edge and soon transformed them into a power to reckon with. Though rooted in Arab traditions their changed outlook had such a great impact that wherever they went they appeared as a group of people united around one God and for whom racial, cultural, linguistic and geographical identities had lost all meaning. However, after the era of the first generation Muslims passed by, gradually a misapprehension began to spread that the Arab culture was the natural color of Islam. Some even considered the grandeur of the Abbasid Empire as the logical destination of the *rabbani* movement. The Arab bias or *asabiyah* became a norm for the later Muslims to emulate. Further, the degeneration of the *mawaali* institution, from a brotherly corporation into a social protectorate, also led us to believe that hence-forward non-Arabs had to limit themselves only to the periphery of the Islamic movement. An empire founded on the Arab *asabiyah* claiming the superiority of some Arab clans left little room for the remnants of other prophetic communities to join in. The once God-oriented vision embracing all was now transformed into the idea of a community centered around the personality of a prophet. This was a clear case of misplaced loyalty, or what is termed as the *ghuloo* in Qur'anic terminology. The idea of a new Ummah centered around an Arab prophet, reduced the new believers to the status of just another community, and like the Jews and the Christians, yet another slice of the great Abrahamic loaf. This process of the closing of the Muslim mind not only transformed them from within, it also changed the entire world around them.

The Ummah was now on a course of perpetual decline and its *ulema* had embraced an intellectual exile. However, the so called golden age of Abbasid Baghdad, or the splendor of Muslim Spain and Mughal India and the military prowess of the Ottoman Empire created illusions to cover up our ever declining graph. It was a process through which the Muslim nation, the *Ummah Muhammadiyah* had defeated Islam. The very emergence of the cult of Islam, or Muhammadan nation, had in fact sounded the death knell of an ideology based Ummah. The color of God no more remained the only identity of Muslims. Forced to take shelter in the psychological prison-house of their own making, Muslims made Ummah the main focus of their concern, nay rather object of worship. The cult worship further degenerated into sub-cults and the new believers found new identities to cling to. Internal feuds between the Shiites and Sunnis, Hanafis and Shafe'is, not only engineered the fall of Muhammadan Empires, it caused so much ideological confusion that it became almost impossible to figure out who really was the true representative of Islam. That something had gone awry with the House of Islam became a general feeling, however those who came to repair the situation focused mainly on the reorientation of the *Ummah*

*Muhammadiyah* itself. What had been the main cause of its ailment came to be regarded as its cure.

Instead of employing the cultic notion of *Ummah Muhammadiyah* the Qur'an uses the term *Ummah Mislimah*. In Abraham's moving prayer one hears him saying: 'Our Lord! Make us submitters to you and raise from among our children a nation of submitters,' أُمَّةٌ مُّسْلِمَةٌ لَّكَ [2:128]. Abraham enjoined upon his sons and so did Jacob: 'my sons! Die not except in the state of submission' [2:133]. The Qur'anic vision of *Ummah Muslimah* comprises all those submitters no matter in which geographical, historical or civilizational slot they are to be found. It is a glittering galaxy of all the prophets and their true followers. The people of Cave whom God blessed and protected, female role models such as Mary (Jesus' mother) and Pharaoh's wife and all other believing nations mentioned in the Qur'an or left unmentioned, together they constitute the broader Ummah of Islam. Despite these clear pronouncements if there still are people who insist that Abraham was a Jew or a Christian, the Qur'an challenges their misconceptions: 'Say! You know better or God?' [2:140]. Calling Abraham a Jew or looking on Muhammad as the founder of *Ummah Muhammadiyah* is tantamount to causing a great injustice: 'And who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from Allah?' [2:140]. And those who still insist that the present day *Ummah Muhammadiyah* constitutes the sum total of *Ummah Muslimah* can they dare expel Abraham and his progeny or Aasiya and Mary from the Islamic fold? Salvation for Submitters alone: Those who submit themselves to the Lord Almighty and make right moves need not worry about their salvation. This is the assurance given to all those who submit to one Lord thereby constituting the broader Ummah of submitters. On the contrary those born in the Muslim tradition and even raised in the family of submitters if they take recourse to a non-Abrahmic way, this assurance is immediately withdrawn:

﴿ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ ﴾ [5:17]

or

﴿ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ ﴾ [5:73]

Such and the like verses are clear indications that mere group identity is no good for salvation nor any blood relation with a group of submitters or *Ummah Muslimah* can be a sufficient grounds for it. This is why the Jewish and the Christian claim – the traditional Muslims of Muhammad's time – that they were the darling children of God, the chosen ones, was out rightly dismissed [5:18].

That the Qur'anic term *Ummah Muslimah* is a broad based House of submitters can further be asserted by a re-reading of surah Ambiya where we are assured once

again: 'Verily this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord and Cherisher, therefore worship me' [21: 91]. It consists of a long chain of submitters from Abraham to Lot down to Solomon, Jacob, Ishmael, Idrees, Zulkifl, Zunnoon, Zachariah, Yahya and Mary. All of them in fact constitute one single group though their later generations might have divided themselves among different groupings: *وَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ* [21:93]. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an emphasizing that all those submitting to one God constitute one Ummah as opposed to those who get trapped in sectarian thinking or taking refuge in cult worship. The Qur'anic verdict that this set of people are one nation [2:213] or this Ummah of yours is one Ummah [21:92] can better be explained by yet another expression: 'Abraham alone constitutes an Ummah' *إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً*, the same Abraham who is projected as a role model for Muslims for all time. Abraham's submission is beyond all doubts as he never created a cult of his own nor was he the originator of a Jewish or Christian identity. Those who follow him will have to be an integral part of the greater Ummah of Islam.

This broader view of the *Ummah Muslimah* was in operation in the heyday of Islam. Even during the dangerous times of war and fierce struggle when Muslims had to face open opposition from Jewish and Christian quarters the vision of the broader Ummah of Islam remained intact. For we are warned in the Qur'an, time and again, not to fall prey to generalization. There are still many among the People of the Book sticking to the truth:

﴿ وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ أُمَّةٍ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ ﴾ [7:159]

Among them are also God-fearing nice souls who stand all night long reciting the word of God and prostrating themselves in adoration [3:113]. As group identity is not a source of salvation it cannot be an excuse for condemnation either. 'Those among you who are more God-conscious are more worthy in the sight of God' [49:13]. 'On that day every soul will have to carry his own burden alone' [74:38]. Such verses then, are sufficient pointers to the fact that submitters to God together constitute one nation and for them God's favor is guaranteed: 'Those who believe and those of the Jews and Christians and the Sabians who believe in Allah and the last day and work righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve' [2:62]. This verse of the Qur'an extending scope of salvation to the followers of other prophets, to the submitters of other faith groups, has been an enigma to many Muslim ulema and jurists and a matter of irreconcilable controversy. While Abu Hamid Ghazali, Rashid Radha and Tabatabaei believed that God's mercy would be extended to the submitters of other faith groups, for an overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars this

notion was no less than a blasphemy. 'Where then does Muhammed stand in the scheme of things?' they quipped. The more Muslims started looking at Muhammad as the founder of a new Ummah it became increasingly difficult for them to find in him the convergence of the great Abrahamic tradition. They also lost sight of the fact that Islam, the chosen *deen* of God propagated by all true prophets throughout history, is essentially a God-centered religion. It was St. Augustine's hand in theology that made salvation almost impossible without Jesus. Those who fashion Muhammad in similar light or place him on a much higher pedestal of intercession, are in fact guilty of operating within an Augustinian framework. As opposed to Augustinian Christianity where salvation is the sole right of Christians, the Qur'an discourages humans to pass strictures on this sensitive issue. We have to keep our mouths shut not only about the People of the Book who are taken as our natural allies, but even about those who are guilty of committing *shirk*. It is God's prerogative, we are told: 'on that day God will bring forth His verdict about them' [22:17]. In the same as God created people in different clans and races so that they can be mutually recognized [49:13], it is also His scheme that His obedient children are known with varying labels. 'Had God so willed', we are told, 'He would have raised us as one Ummah,' but it is His plan to test us in what has come down to us. We are therefore exhorted to mutually compete in acts of goodness [5:48]. If submitters to one God find themselves in divergent traditions of submission this diversity should not be cause for worry. The Qur'an testifies to the fact that the Torah and *Injil* have come down from the same source and there too one may find guidance and light. Those claiming to inherit different prophetic traditions should not sink so low in their disputes as to indulge in deciding who is going to hell or who can be sure of salvation. Instead, what we are all required to do is to 'strive in a stiff competition of virtues; for God alone is the goal of us all, it is He who will show us the truth of the matters in which we dispute' [5:48]. Having been aware of the unique position of Muhammad in history, the first generation of Muslims never diverged in such issues. Instead, they considered the remnants of earlier prophets as their natural ideological allies with whom a common program of action could be worked out: 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God' [3:64]. Assigned to a leadership role as they were, the earlier Muslims displayed a marked openness in embracing submitters of different hue to their fold. The door of the new Islamic movement was open on all those willing to compete in acts of goodness. However, those still trapped in sectarian thinking or who attached undue importance to their Jewish or Christian identity, they were reminded that they would find no reward

for themselves unless they kept to the teachings of Torah [5:68]. Though claiming to be representative of Jewish or Christian faith, they are the people who have taken their identity as God and sunken in cult worship. No good is to be expected from such closed-minded people. Hence it is advisable to stay away from them: 'O submitters! Take not the Jew and Christians for your friends and protectors' [5:51]. Such and like pronouncements however should not be taken as a general statement. For we are reminded in the Qur'an: 'Not all of them are alike: of the People of the Book are an upright Ummah, they recite the words of God all night long and they prostrate themselves in adoration' [3:113]. Since the early Muslims considered the People of the Book as their natural ally, they found no fault in socially mixing with them. The Qur'an had allowed their food lawful for Muslims. And as Muslim men were encouraged to take believing women as their wives on condition of piety so they were also allowed to marry with chaste women from among the People of the Book [5:5]. In a God-centered society founded on *taqwa* alone where the call for becoming *rabbani* or God-oriented had attained such a high pitch none could even have dreamt that one day the same people would undergo such a through transformation that it would be difficult for them to look at themselves as upholder of the *rabbani* identity and being Muslims would come to be regarded as wearing a cultural identity rather than the pure unconditional submission. Owing to some historical factors and political upheavals, unfortunately this great tragedy befell on Muslims. Gradually the Muslim national identity took precedence over their *rabbani* identity. This initiated the process of the closing of the Muslim mind. Soon Muslims found themselves surrounded with a plethora of doubtful historical material and unreliable traditions that had to shape the new Muslim identity in the centuries to come.

This transformation of a people entrusted to lead history until end time, from *Ummah Muslimah* into *Ummah Muhammadiyah*, gave birth to a whole new set of beliefs about the Ummah and its prophet. Like the other earlier nations Muslims too prided themselves on their cultic identity and projected their prophet as the super prophet. As upholders of the Qur'an they once had found it difficult to swallow the illogical claim of the Jews that no fire will touch them except for a short period and that heaven is their eventual destination irrespective of what they do, but now they had developed the same fancies about themselves. In the legends that shaped the new Muslim mind Muhammed is seen as having exceptional the ability to intercede to win the salvation of his Ummah. On that appointed day when Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets will shy away from taking up a single case of intercession, Muhammad upholding the banner of God's praise will be able to send his own folk en masse to heaven. Some traditions even relate that given the mass entry of Muslims to heaven there



would be a general feeling that Muhammad's Ummah as a whole was being treated like the Israelite prophets. The envisioning of an unjust God and an equally partial prophet left Muslims with no choice but to take shelter in the psychological shell of their own making. This was a great mistake. By projecting Muhammad as the super prophet they in fact painted him as a cult hero. All those who were passionately eulogizing him as the great hero of Muhammadan Ummah were in fact pouring on him insult of the worst kind. The great international prophet whom the Qur'an depicts as a blessing to all mankind, about him we were told by the fabricators that when his end came he was only worried about his own folk. On his death bed he muttered *ummati ummati* and on the Day of Judgment too, as the traditions have it, he will maneuver God's judgment in favor of his own people. If the prophet is seen as one working for *Ummah Muhammediyah* alone how can one expect from his followers that they will mirror themselves as Warners to all or work for the general good of humanity.

# A Muslim Initiative on Palestine

A Muslim initiative on Palestine is long overdue. So far, the Muslims have been mainly responding to the initiatives of the others. This has put them on a receiving end leaving little room for them to envision a future beyond the initiatives laid down by their opponents. Now after half a century of unmindful military adventures it has become clear to the thinking minds in Israel that a third world war is no solution to the Palestinian question. The Muslims too on the other hand realise that a mere armed struggle or suicide bombing holds no promise of delivering them from the present impasse. Both sides find themselves in a catch-22 situation.

First, a few words about the Jewish mind. The Jews once known for 'arrested development' are out today to push history towards apocalypse. They have long been waiting for the Messiah who, they believe, would restore to them the Kingdom of Solomon and David. In their desperate search for a Messiah, many a Bar Kokhba and a Sabbatai Zevi have taken often them on a ride. Now the Christian evangelists are exploiting it to the full, pushing the Jews in dangerous directions, for a head-on collision with history itself. Today, a Jewish-Christian alliance for the Final Redemption of Israel may appear to be a convenient proposition but the future historians will write that in their desperate push for apocalypse the Jewish nation had become a mere tool in the hands of misguided evangelists.

The Jewish-Christian alliance that is hell-bent on accelerating the events leading to Armageddon is rooted in a flawed mythical thinking. While the Jews believe that the advent of the Messiah will herald a new beginning for them, the Christian evangelists, on the other hand, view it essentially as a fulfilment of their own cherished scheme. According to this view, rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem will culminate in the second coming of the Messiah. Evangelical Christians are pushing the Jews towards Armageddon in which according to some folk-lore accounts almost two thirds of the Jewish population is destined to perish. This mythical thinking among the Jews and some sections of Christians and their allies has not only created unending woes in Palestine, it has also been instrumental, to a great extent, for American misadventures in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

Jewish empowerment in our time has been rather problematic. For the first time in their history Jews are enjoying political power in Palestine and are in a position to wield a considerable amount of influence globally. Jerusalem is now very much under Jewish control. Yet the *halakaic* complexities have made it impossible for them to rebuild the long-cherished Third Temple. Not long ago, in 1948, the creation of the Jewish state was viewed as a miracle, a clear indication that God was on their side. In 1967 when the Israeli Army took over Jerusalem without any significant resistance, the world Jewry looked at the Six Day War as unfolding events leading up to the Final Days. Yet during the 'momentous' days of God's great favor a third temple in Jerusalem could not be conceived. The Jewish Redemption is no political project. It is rather *halakaic*.

As per *halakaic* rulings the present-day Jews are 'ritually impure' and hence they are not allowed to step in the *kotel*, the Temple Mount. Any violation of this is punishable by death, *kareth*. To attain the ritual purity, they need the ablution of the ashes of a red heifer correctly administered by a Cohen. And neither a red heifer nor a qualified Cohen is available in our time. Supposing they somehow solve the riddle they would still need an altar. Locating the altar in the Temple area is again problematic as the *halakaic* rulings about exact location of the altar is very precise. It is said that at the time of building the second temple there were reliable witnesses. The prophets Haggai, Zephaniah and Malachi could testify to the exact spot. Today they do not have any such figure. If there is any hope it is realisable only when the prophet Elijah comes. The Third Temple even if it is built, will be a defunct institution as there is no Sanhedrin to choose a high priest. For a valid Sanhedrin, the council of seventy-one Rabbis, its members must be of Mosaic ordination, i.e., tracing an unbroken chain of transmission since Moses. This chain, they believe, remains broken since the year 358 CE owing to the persecutions Constantine imposed upon the Jews. Then there is the issue of ten lost tribes of Israel who are yet to be traced and make a come back.

Given the Jewish hankering for the Third Temple, this is a very depressing scenario. The secular Jews who hardly care for *halakaic* rulings are in no mood for wasting their time in waiting. In fact the very creation of Israel owes to its initiative to the Zionist aspirations when a group of 'emancipated Jews' took the matter into their own hands instead of passively wishing one another 'next year in Jerusalem'. However, they do not want to push the temple issue any further, as they fear it may open a Pandora's box of unending *halakaic* debates, pitting one Jewish sect against the other.

In the nineteenth-century Eastern Europe when the Jewish leaders were calling for a return to Palestine they argued that since the Messiah would come in the land of Canaan, the Jews were to assemble there to give him a warm welcome. This little twist

in Jewish thinking later paved the way for the creation of Israel. Creating a Jewish state has never been and is not a religious obligation for the Jews. Rather, it is against the *halakaic* rulings for the ordinary 'impure' Jews to venture on a divine project. The Zionists however left no stone unturned to make the world Jewry believe that the state of Israel was an integral part of their religious worldview. Today a fake Sanhedrin exists in Israel and attempts are underway to breed a red heifer. The Jews around the world are continuously told that the sole purpose of their life is to support the Israeli state in some way or the other.

The Zionists no doubt were successful in settling millions of Jews in Israel, nevertheless, some two-thirds of world Jewry is still living outside the Israeli borders. In recent years, the Jewish immigration to Israel has waned and many of the young Jews are thinking of settling somewhere else. According to a survey published in *ynetnews.com*, 33% of the young Jews (18-29 years) want to leave Israel. And the new generation of Jews living in America feels no emotional link with Israel. They are the 'cool Jews', as dubbed by the Jewish intellectuals. They are critical of the Israeli policies and find it difficult to side with the bunch of corrupt politicians, who, they blame, have hijacked the Jewish agenda. Inside Israel, the religious fervor that once was the hallmark of a nation experiencing its renaissance and who once believed following their victory in the Six Day war, that God was once again out for their active support, that sublime feeling of sweet Godly touch is no longer part of the Jewish psyche.

Taking stock of the situation from the Jewish angle, the creation of the Israeli state has been a frustrating experience. In their enthusiasm to accelerate the process of history, the Zionists have rather unwittingly become a tool in the hands of Evangelical Christians who have pushed them for a head-on collision with the Muslim people, their traditional ally who had provided the Jews with a safe haven for many centuries, a fact widely acknowledged in Jewish sources. This artificial push to history has been disastrous for the Jewish nation. In their mad pursuit of Jewish glory, they have become rather the apprentices of Swastika, as pointed out by Erich Fried, the famous Jewish poet:

*You apprentices of the Swastika  
 You fools and changelings of history  
 Whose Star of David on you flags  
 Turns even quicker  
 Into that damned symbol with its four feet  
 That you just do not want to see  
 But whose path you are following today*

In a purely religious project of Jewish Redemption the secularized ruling elite find themselves at a loss. They do not know what to do next. In Israel, the young Jews have started questioning whether it serves any purpose to make Israel their home. When would the Messiah come if he would come at all? At a recent Herzliya conference, a prominent Jewish thinker, Noble laureate Professor Israel Aumann frankly admitted that the state of Israel is facing today 'an existential threat', a phenomenon not so loudly termed as 'post-Zionism'.

Today there are modern Jews who are willing to have a critical look at the Jewish project of Final Redemption. They might be dubbed by the extremists as 'self-hating Jews', nevertheless, their number is significantly on the rise.

Now it is for the Muslim people to make their Jewish brethren and sisters conscious of the delusions that they have lived under for so long. As upholders of the last revelation, we Muslims have a religious obligation to rescue the nations trapped in the myths of their own making. However, a Muslim initiative cannot be effective unless we have a true insight into the apocalyptic vision of the Jewish mind and its real import. As Muslims we have no inhibition to say it loud and clear that we are no other but true practitioners of Abrahamic religion. Christ is one of our beloved prophets. And if it so happens that one day he surfaces in Israel, we Muslims will be the first to welcome him. We will feel honored to open for him the golden gate of the holy sanctuary. In fact we were the ones who restored the sanctity of the Temple Mount when our leader Caliph Omer took over the city from Christian control. Further, it was under Turkish control, in the sixteenth century, when we traced the Western Wall and invited the Jews to join us in the worship of one God. The apocalyptic vision that assigns a key role to the second coming of the Messiah is not only prevalent among Christians, there are many Muslims who equally share this myth. Some popular traditions even lay out graphic details of how one day the Messiah will descend from a heavenly cloud on a white dome in Damascus. Whether one likes such stories or not, the wisdom lies in letting the future unfold itself and in postponing the fighting till the Messiah comes.

Of the Jews, the Qur'an tells us that among them are some noble souls who care for truth.

[7:159] ﴿وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ أُمَّةٍ يَهْتَدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْتَدِلُونَ﴾

We should have no inhibition in inviting the God-fearing souls among the Jews for an honest and frank dialogue as stipulated in the Qur'an: 'O ye who adhere to a divine book! Come to common terms as between us and you; that we worship none

but Allah, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah’.

﴿قُلْ يَا هَلَلِ الْكِنْتَبِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكَمُ إِلَّا نَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا  
أَشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾ [3:64]

# The Palestinian Problem: If Truth be told

For a long time the land of Palestine has been waiting for a just resolution of its problem. Whatever efforts have been undertaken so far on both sides have not produced any encouraging results. The loss of human lives is mounting by the day. On the one side we have the state of Israel armed with the most sophisticated weaponry; and on the other side we have a motley group of helpless resistant organizations who do not have any other weapon except their lives. For the last fifty years the hatred against one another has grown more intense; in the charged atmosphere the voice of sanity and wisdom is bound to drown in the cacophony of jingoistic slogans. The current situation is such that human corpses are being piled up on both sides; the only difference is that the pile is disproportionately bigger on one side. The surprising thing is that this battle is being fought between the two communities that consider themselves to be the most devoted followers of God, and both the sides seek the legitimacy of their struggle in their obedience to the God of Abraham and the sacred relics of their prophets. The religious and political leaders of both the contending parties have given it the aspect of a fight between good and evil. For both, there cannot be any negotiation on even one inch of the land of Palestine, nor can there be any compromise. Under the circumstances, the only logical conclusion one can draw is that the mightier side will win the battle. However, the problem is that in today's world if states have become extraordinarily powerful because of their technological dominance, on the other side, the guerrilla tactics of extremist and terrorist organizations have become such a weapon in the hands of the weak and the helpless that no state power can ignore or totally do away with them.

The Israelis know very well that despite the absolute power of their state it is just not possible to wipe out all the Palestinians from the face of the earth. The Palestinians, too, know that their suicide attacks cannot inflict a deadly blow to the state of Israel, but both the groups are trapped in their self-conceived notion of sacred history in such a way that there seems to be no way out of the impasse. Both the sides

have become exhausted after this long war of attrition, but neither side is ready to accept it because of a false sense of national pride.

At this juncture of history when the adherents of the Torah and the followers of the Qur'an are locked in a deadly combat and either side claims that it is the rightful inheritor of the holy land, it is necessary that the pious people on both sides whose hearts are filled with the fear of God, who can rise above the considerations of narrow, sectarian advantages and think only of God's pleasure, should come forward and do something in the light of their own religious education and training and create opportunities for dialogue to put an end to this endless cycle of violence and loss of human lives.

Right from the time the state of Israel came into being, a large number of Jewish scholars have considered its establishment to be against the Torah. According to them, there is no justification for a state for the Israelites before the advent of the Messiah. There is also no dearth of courageous thinkers among them who declare the state of Israel to be anti-Semitic in its orientation, where the teachings of the Torah are openly flouted. The criticism of and opposition to the Israeli government mounted by the Jewish scholars themselves on the issue of oppression against the Palestinians has, perhaps, been more intense than any external criticism or opposition. If you read the writings of these God-fearing Jewish scholars and take a look at the movements within Israel against Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, it will become clear that even today there is no dearth of pious souls among them for whom we find words of appreciation in the Qur'an. What is needed is that from the side of Muslims, too, rather than taking extreme nationalistic postures, there should be a strong initiative based on Qur'anic teachings that can probably lead to a Qur'anic solution.

There is no doubt about the fact that from a nationalistic point of view, our case is a fairly strong one. We are the people on whose land a state has been foisted blatantly on the strength of brute power, and thus an unending war has been waged on us. Now, if we believe that there can be no other peaceful solution of the Palestinian problem excepting that the Israeli occupying power should leave and the state of Israel should be erased, then no one can accuse us for taking such a stance. However, if we take it as the last word on the issue it will block all possibilities of dialogue with the rival party. And then, for ending the problem, we will only have those threatening statements that we have been hearing for the last fifty years, and despite abiding by them we have not been able to come anywhere near resolving the problem. In the process, though, we have probably become accustomed to dealing with this extremely critical human problem poetically. One sometimes hears such statements as – 'if all the



Muslims of the world pour one bucket of water each on Israel, then the state of Israel will be washed away' or 'if all the Muslims of the world spit on Israel, the entire state will be drowned in it.' Emotive utterances like these can make our blood race through our veins temporarily, but their practical feasibility is not clear even to those who make such utterances.

On the one side we have the government of the ruthless autocrat Ariel Sharon that has crossed all records of barbarity and human oppression. The whole machinery of the government is steeped in corruption. On the other side we have Arafat and his cronies who have played ducks and drakes with the money received as aid from different countries in the name of the hapless Palestinian people. Neither the rulers of Israel have any concern for the Jewish Faith, nor is the objective of the Palestinian authority to establish a Qur'anic order in Palestine. But the people who are laying down their lives on both sides are doing so because they are imbued with a sense of religious devotion and who believe, in all sincerity, that their martyrdom is a religious duty. Is there any justification to make the sacrifice of so many lives to sustain the rule of Sharon and Arafat or two future states that would be anti-Torah and anti-Qur'an?

If the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, despite their use of a non-religious, even anti-religious idiom, are both able to enlist the support of the extremist religious sections, it is due to the reason that the religious leadership on both sides is trapped, by and large, into viewing history in the name of religion. Such a concept of history, because of our attitude of reverence towards the past, has given it a halo of sacredness, and has no relationship with the real objectives of the Faith. The need of the hour is that, rather than looking at the issue merely from the perspective of the Muslim community, we should try to look at it, with an open mind, from the perspective of the other party as well, and then try to find some practical solution to this immensely complex issue in the light of Qur'anic insights. The Jews say that merely walking the distance of four square feet in the sacred land Palestine can ensure their entry into paradise. They cannot offer any evidence from the Torah in support of such a superstitious belief. Of course, there is no dearth of such good tidings in the Talmudic literature. They say that their religious life is incomplete without their house of worship. Apart from the sacrificial altar at the Solomon's Temple, they do not have the concept of sacrifice anywhere else. Exploited by the political leadership, the religious-minded among the Jews who have been praying for ages for the return of the land of Canaan, feel that after some two thousand years they have now been armed with the power to restore the religious life of the Solomon's Temple once again. So, they do not want to miss this historic opportunity. On the other side, the oppression and brutality perpetrated against

the Palestinians, their displacement from their own land are facts of contemporary history that no one can ignore. Moreover, the axial position of the Aqsa moque and Dome of the Rock as the first *qibla* among Muslims has made that part of the Palestinian land as sacred to Muslims as it is to the Jews. That is why any compromise on this holy place is regarded by both sides as a sell out. The assassination of Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin at the hands of their own compatriots highlighted the intensity of this feeling on both sides. This is just one aspect of the problem that has played a central role in making the encounters so bloody and ruthless.

At a juncture when the intensity of emotion is running high on both sides and there seems no possibility of a just and proper solution to the problem and the followers of Abraham and the racial and spiritual offspring of Isaac and Ishmael are locked in a heinous and deadly battle for the same house of worship and when the claimants of the unity of God (*tawhid*) have forgotten that God demands their unconditional surrender rather than their prayers in a particular mosque or a special kind of prayer house, what is necessary is that we Muslims should come forward as the followers of the Qur'an and remind people of the forgotten fact that what Allah demands is not Judaism, Christianity or conventional Islam, nor any particular kind of structure, nor the sectarian worship performed therein. He considers *كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَىٰ* to be reprehensible and intends people to become part of the pious community of Abraham (*مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا*). The need of the hour is that the pious souls among Abraham's community should come forward and try to take the land of Palestine out of its present morass, for the sake of God. They should not care whether their initiatives will earn them the wrath of their own community or will harm their national interest. Sometime ago, when Avram Burg, a member of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, advised the Israeli state to behave realistically, the Zionist world called him an enemy of the Jews. There is no dearth of people like Avram Burg among the Israelis. However, the problem is that for our understanding of the community of the Israelites, rather than depending on the insights available in the Qur'an, we depend more on Syed Qutb's famous booklet – *معركتنا مع اليهود* (Our Fight with the Jews) where all Jews, without any distinction, appear to be the mysterious characters of a devilish gang. For a long time we have been prisoners of the commentaries where the statement – *غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ* – has been taken, without any distinction, to imply the communities of the Israelites and the Christians. In our extreme antagonism we do not reflect on the fact that the Qur'an which contains the statements by the Most Just Authority cannot exhort people to curse all the future generations of Jews merely because some of the individuals or tribes of this community were nasty to the Prophet

and the Muslim community of that time. In the Qur'an, some of the individuals belonging to the Quraish tribe have also been condemned, and warned of terrible consequences in this world and the world hereafter. Despite this, we cannot think it in our wildest imagination that their offspring should be punished and cursed till the Day of Judgment. Thus, there is no reason why all future generations of a community should be cursed and condemned for the mischief of some members of one generation. A similar situation obtains with the religious thinking of the Israelites. They have decided, under the influence of Talmudic interpretations, that other communities of the world stand nowhere in comparison with the earlier community of Jews. Their blood is cheap and their cultures worthless. The need of the hour is that we should abandon all these stereotypes and conventional thinking on the problem of Palestine and look at it anew in the light of the deeper insights from the Qur'an. Only then will we be able to save the lives being lost on a daily basis, and the historical land of Palestine will be a place where People of the Book from different Faiths can render their prayers, as in the past. Where have those steadfast and pious souls of the People of the Book gone about whom the Qur'an says that they would wake up at night and keep praying to God, and for whom the Qur'an promises that their good actions would not go un-rewarded? (وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ) Along with this, we also must search for the God-fearing souls amongst us who can display extraordinary courage in rising above narrow national interest and can assert: 'O People of the Book come to common terms as between us and you that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from amongst ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah' [3:64].

*(Note: This article was written before the sad demise of Yasser Arafat)*

# To be or not to be a European Muslim

The other day I came across Sandy Thom's 'I wish I was a Punk Rocker with flowers in my hair' and I was awfully amazed by the amount of nostalgia that had engulfed the song: 'Ow I was born too late/ To a world which does not care'. That sweet world – 'When music really mattered and when radio was king/ When accountants didn't have control/ And the media couldn't buy your soul/ ...When pop stars still remained a myth/ And ignorance could still be bliss/ ...And the only way to stay in touch was a letter in the mail/... And the super info highway was still drifting out in space' – is alas no more.

We Muslims are not generally trained to appreciate western music nor do we usually feel that the problems of western man can be our own yet Sandy's nostalgic cry of a sweet dying world deeply touched me. The invisible forces of globalization have demolished all the boundaries between the East and the West. Be they materialists of the West or spiritual seers of the East all inhabit the same planet and hence share a common destiny. Today, the complete alienation of the individual, the emergence of directionless and ruthless capitalism, the much talked about ecological imbalance and the total media-engineered blindness that we suffer are not the specific problems of western man alone.

Muslim thinkers have so far shied away from any passionate involvement in the issues that confront the West today. Instead they have tried to create a world of their own, a sort of ivory tower, wherein we hear of Islamic music, Islamic economics and Islamic science etc. However, the last decade has witnessed a shift in our thinking. Partly owing to the implied smallness of the globe and partly due to the emergence of Muslim societies in the major capitals of the West, we feel, more than ever before, an urgency to speak out what we feel on issues of common concern. The Islamic ghettos that once we so effectively created by building mosques, establishing Islamic centers and Muslim schools have virtually become redundant. This has led some Muslim intellectuals to think of new alternatives. Isolation or ghetto living has been disastrous. It only helped our enemies create a web of suspicion around us. Should Muslims be

integrated into the local societies and become German by culture and Muslim by faith, as one would argue? Or, is it ideologically possible to be a western Muslim?

In recent years, some scholars have been vociferously advocating for an all-out integration of Muslims into western society. They argue that the attitude of seclusion has placed Muslims on the margins, leaving almost no role for them in socio-political arena. If they reinvent themselves as full-fledged citizens and play a proactive role they will emerge as spiritual powerhouses and the West too will be enriched by high morality of its Muslim citizens. Some would even urge us to go a step further, from integration to 'contribution', participating fully in all schemes of nation building. They also argue that, as the West is a new home to Islam – a radically different setting, western Muslims must fashion a different identity from their eastern counterparts.

The craving for a western Muslim identity based on integration, however, has created some traumatic intellectual crises. For many Muslims living in the West, Islam and the West are not always reconcilable. The national interest of the country of their citizenship often collides with the greater interest of Islam. Recent western interventions in the Muslim world; the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, also the unflinching American support to Israel, has only reinforced the belief that the West is antagonistic to Islam. Reconciling Islamic faith with a western national interest then becomes an impossible proposition. If the unjust policies of the western governments often prompt their erstwhile diplomats, retired politicians and even army personnel to come out against their own governments, how can it be possible for Muslim citizens to bury their conscience, and for how long? In recent years, millions of people have been marching in the western streets against the unjust, inhuman and immoral policies of their governments. However, if the Muslims organize a similar protest it is not taken as a mark of their belief in democracy, instead they are looked at as potential terrorists who have yet to be adjusted to the local society. In short, the western Muslim finds himself in a perpetual fix; to be or not to be westernized and a Muslim, one and at the same time.

Is Islam all about spirituality and morality that could be integrated into any system? Probably, the advocates of integration have purposely ignored some essential ingredients of Islamic ideology in order to avoid issues that are more sensitive. Let me elaborate. Muslims believe that by virtue of being upholders of the last revelation they are entrusted to calling people to good and forbidding them from wrong. And in their efforts to create a just system they are enjoined to seek active participation from all believing nations. A conglomerate of conscientious individuals as the future Islamic society is envisioned; it has neither to bear the mark of an Arab identity nor seeking to

establish western hegemony. True, the venture of Islam began in an Arabian setting but Muhammad was not essentially an Arabian prophet nor is Islam's basic mould essentially Arabic. It was made plain and clear that the Prophet had come to establish no new identity rather he was commanded to revive the religion of Abraham who the Qur'an depicts as a role model for submitters for all time to come. To be a Jew or a Christian (Muslims of the Prophet's time) was not enough to assure one's success in the hereafter. Instead, the Qur'anic revelation linked salvation with true faith (*iman*) and good deeds (عمل صالح). No matter which religious fold the faithful belonged to, if he qualified the essentials, he was assured a share in the hereafter:

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ  
وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾ [2:62]

Those who believe and those of Jewry, and the Christians and the Sabians, whosoever believes in God and the hereafter and work righteousness – shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve [2:62].

The Islamic social order is a healthy composition of varieties of faiths and ideologies singing in unison the glory of God, competing one another in righteousness. Ideologically, we Muslims are inheritors of a prophetic tradition that did not begin with Muhammad though it ended with him. As our faith incorporates all the prophets of all time and place it is natural that our society also bears a testimony to this great heritage:

﴿ قُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ  
وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ  
وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴾ [2:136]

Say: We believe in God and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them ( لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ ) (مِّنْهُمْ): and we submit to God [2:136].

Believing in all the prophets without any distinction or preference is a precondition to one's submission to God. For any possible deviation, the believers are thus scolded:

﴿ فَإِنِ ءَامَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا ءَامَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ  
فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴾ [2:137]

So if they believe as ye believe, they are indeed on the right path; but if they turn back, it is they who are in schism... [2:137].

An ideal Islamic society must bear a trans-cultural identity wherein converges the essence of the entire prophetic tradition. To this phenomenon the Qur'an applies the phrase 'acquiring the color of God', صبغة الله, which once was the hallmark of the Muslim community and which if revived to its full will make divergent faith communities feel at home in a Muslim society.

The Qur'an exhorts us to become *rabbani* and thus constitute a God-centered society which alone can guarantee equal opportunity for all faith groups to flourish. There are recurring indications in the Qur'an that God wants us to forge a greater federation of faith communities. In surah *Haj* we are told of monasteries, churches and synagogues, other than the mosques, as there too the name of God is commemorated in abundance:

﴿وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ هُدَّيْتُمْ صَوَامِعَ وَبِيَعٍ وَصَلَوَاتٍ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا  
 [22:40] اَسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلِيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَن يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ﴾

Had God not checked one group of people by another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure... [22:40].

This then is a broad outline of Islam-for-all, a universal salvific mission in which the followers of Muhammad have to play a pivotal role but the other faith groups too will not have the feeling of left out. A mega project such as this cannot be executed in isolation or by ghetto mindset. Those who advocate for a life of seclusion by creating small Islamic ghettos have little understanding of the universal salvific mission of Islam. The great *fuqaha* of the past who saw the world divided between the two opposing blocks of *darul-Kufr* and *darul-Islam* also missed this point. As for those who are exhorting us today to become a European Muslim or fully participate in schemes of nation building and who, with all their good intentions, wish to create among us some Muslim Henry Kissingers or Jack Straws are no less ignorant of Islamic mission. Integrating into western societies no doubt can send Muslims to the corridors of power and they can even prove themselves as better citizens than their Jewish or Christian counterparts, but there is no guarantee that their 'integration' or 'contribution' will also advance the salvific mission of Islam. There are many nations and tribes on this planet working day in and out to foster their respective national interests. If Muslims are also absorbed in a similar projects, who will take care of the broader interest of humanity? Integration can be a viable strategy to penetrate into western societies and it may even

be a shortcut to taking control of major western capitals by democratic means, but the salvific mission that we Muslims are entrusted with, is far lofty to forsake it for the sake of power.

I am no advocate for isolation or ghetto mindset. Yet I feel that a mad push for integration without laying out a proper intellectual foundation will take us nowhere. The Islamic faith, ingrained as it is in the Muslim psyche, tells us that we Muslims do not have a national or communitarian interest of our own. We are supposed to work for a just order in which all nations of the world may find solace. Working solely for the British or American national interest will pit us against our own conscience. For us the entire humanity is one nation, the children of the same God who has entrusted us to take care of them all. It is not possible for us to become a pawn in the hands of any system that cares only for its own people bothering little how adversely its policies affect other nations without giving up this lofty mission.

The integrationists are basically swayed by the success story of western Jewry. The Jews lived in the margins of history for so long that diaspora (*galut*) became their national identity. But once they decided to forsake, or at least downplay, their Jewish identity and got integrated into the local societies they emerged as a power to reckon with. The Jewish experience however was not all about integration. The Jewish revival owes much to the eighteenth century discourse about the nature of religious and secular knowledge. Integration too had its own share but its adverse effects cannot be downplayed. Moses Mendelssohn who is seen as the intellectual father of Reformed Judaism championed a European identity for the Jews. No doubt, on the personal level, Mendelssohn's was a success story as he was appointed court philosopher by Frederick II, the King of Prussia. Nevertheless, integration had its own toll. Mendelssohn's entire progeny left the Jewish fold; his daughters, Dorothea and Henrietta converted to Catholicism and his son, Abraham, induced his children to become Christians for he believed that 'it (Christianity) is the conviction of most well-bred human beings.' Forsaking Jewish identity in favor of a European one, no doubt, brought the Jewish nation to the helm of affairs; nonetheless, it also pitted Jews against their own redemption project. Today, despite so much power at their command, the Jewish nation is in a fix: the third temple is not feasible as a religious project.

There is much for us to learn from the Jewish experience. Without a proper theology of integration, Muslims will have apprehensions about this approach and the integrationists will be seen as mere apologists. What will distinguish a Muslim citizen from his/her non-Muslim counterparts if all of them equally work for the national interest of their country? To say that Muslim participation will add moral and spiritual



elements to western society which badly needs them sounds not only apologetic but it amounts to reducing a great salvific mission to morality. I believe that Muslims in the West, like other parts of the world, cannot play a positive role unless they rediscover the prophetic mission. Neither isolation nor integration nor 'contribution' as Tariq Ramadan would put it, can ensure us the prestige attached to the mission of Muhammad. It is not Islam or Muslims that need to be integrated into the West but it should be the other way round. We need to integrate East and West, Europeans and Asians and other nations of the world into the comforting and salvific mission of Islam. Muslims, no matter if they live in the East or West, must present themselves as a salvific nation who live for others and not for themselves. At this point of history when human freedom and liberty are at stake, when the individual is reeling under the tyranny of capitalism and when there is a widespread feeling that the world-system has got out of hand, Muslims are duty-bound to rescue all six billion human souls that inhabit the world today. This they can only do if they are able to recast prophetic Islam in the modern setting; an Islam that is neither eastern nor western but only bears 'the color of God' calling people to attain a God-centered identity:

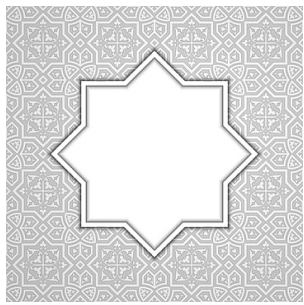
﴿ صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنْ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَخُنِ لَهُرْ عَنِدُونَ ﴾ [2:138]

A mercy unto humanity as Muhammad is, recasting his prophetic message would certainly elicit a universal appeal. In short, what we need today is not to formulate a lame version of Islamic morality making it compatible with the prevailing, ruthless capitalist system but to rediscover the universal message of Islam and employ it as an integrating thread for all nations of the world.



SECTION X

# The Way Forward



# What shall we do now?

The House of Islam is at a turning point today. Muslims around the world are asking themselves: should they reinvent in the new situation or else, allow themselves to perish on the margins of history? As for this sharp-edged vital question, the Muslim mind is alarmingly confused.

Those aware of our centuries long history can rightly point out that the danger is not new though unique it may be, that earlier too we had grappled with such situations of gloom. Confronted yet again with a major crisis, probably the fifth one in our history - the earlier four being; the civil strife leading to the death of the third Caliph, the sack of Abbasid Baghdad, the fall of Grenada, and the termination of the Ottoman Caliphate - we however appear to be devoid of a vision for the future. The psychological fallout of 'war on terror', the direct occupation of Iraq, the colonization of Afghanistan, the subjugation of Libya and Iran, the continued humiliation of Pakistan and other Muslim nations in the face of American imperialism and the ever changing stance of our ulema/ intellectuals on issues of strategic importance have reinforced the notion that, at bottom, our intellectual crisis is more acute and our religious thought more muddled than what meets the eye. In fact, we do not know where we go from here.

Our waywardness is a logical outcome of our self-engineered ouster from the seat of authority and guidance, the God-ordained status of the chosen Ummah. The very first crisis of our history, the civil strife leading to a situation when the center could not hold, eventually set us on the course of perpetual crises. With the murder of Othman not only the political authority was weakened but the very 'spatial atmosphere' of Revelation in which Muslims of the first generation breathed was sent into exile. Since then we Muslims have been journeying centrifugally away from the pure revelatory *Weltanschauung*. The message of Islam, that sharp-edged revolutionary dicta of human dignity and liberation that once had taken the world by storm lost its primal sheen because of the new Muslim color it had acquired. Confronted with the technological might of western imperialism, today when we desperately need, more than ever before, that razor sharp revolutionary dicta, the mesmerizing and sublime power of revelation, we find it transformed into a set of lifeless rituals. Having been charged to lead history till the end of time, we have yet to realize cosmic dimension of our crises. The world

without us is doomed to failure. But before we go ahead to reinstate ourselves once again in the seat of leadership and guidance we need to set our own house in order, or so to say, rediscover the divine light of revelation that once showed us our way.

The movement for Islamic Awakening so vociferously launched in the latter half of the twentieth century and the general mood of jubilation that marked the inception of fifteenth century hijra celebrations made us believe as if a new dawn was imminent. The emergence of pan-Islamic forums in the heartland of Islam further strengthened the belief that a future Muslim Commonwealth can set our caravan to the road of glory. The 1979 revolution in Iran, the expulsion of the Red Army from Afghanistan followed by the dismantlement of the 'Evil Empire' and the miraculous re-emergence of Central Asian Muslim states were yet other factors that contributed to our delusion. Amidst hectic political developments we conveniently ignored the fact that our ideological candor had waned, that our return to the seat of authority and guidance would be a mere dream without mending our ideological fabric, and without recapturing the essence of revelation. Even those who considered it necessary to revive the Ummah on religious grounds were caught up in outer manifestations or at most ended in the implementation of a *fiqhi* worldview of the bygone days. Neither the alien Commonwealth model, nor a *fiqhi* Islam can be a substitute for divine revelation that alone has the potential to transform the Ummah into one unit, the *bunyanum marsoos*, and the vanguard for the unity of mankind. The *fiqhi* mind is essentially divisive. It is likened to send more people out of the Islamic fold than welcoming them inside it. The full-scale display of *fiqhi* Islam, or fatawaic thinking, not only brought the Islamic awakening to a halt, it also pushed us to a head-on collision with other faith groups and civilizational models. The newly founded Islamic centers in western cities remained at best the garrisons of sectarian strife, representing more of the founding sects than the universal message of Islam. The broad based Qur'anic dicta of *kalimatun sawaaen* for forging alliance with other like-minded nations found little support from those predisposed to sectarian thinking. The Muslim presence in the West had offered us a unique opportunity to take the 'revelation-revolution' to western homes. But this wonderful opportunity was conveniently lost amidst a plethora of hairsplitting *fiqhi* questions aimed at establishing cultural islands of traditional Islam. The *fiqhi* mind has now brought us to such a pass that despite our intense romantic hankering for the revival of the House of Islam we find ourselves trapped in a false dawn.

Caught in the imperial ambitions of Bush-Blair nexus, today Muslims are vulnerable to any label that one would like to throw upon them. Having noticed that those fighting a survival battle around the world are none other but Muslims, many

among us ask if Islam is only another name for anarchy or mindless terrorism. Even those actively busy in the survival struggle have strong doubts if this strategy can eventually take us to the glory of a just world order, the mission statement of Islam. The *fiqhi* mind, trained to think in black and white, reminiscent of the social milieu of the Abbasid era, fails to realize the complexity of the new situation and its far-reaching impact on the Muslim psyche. It is split not only into four parallel perceptions but also into innumerable conflicting reportages of mere historical import. Unless this psyche goes back to the pristine purity of revelation it can only add to our woes by monopolizing its traditional perception as the only authentic version. If in the past Shia-Sunni dispute and Hanfi-Shafei bloody strife caused the fall of the Abbasid Empire, today too, our internal strife is a constant source of hope for our enemies. Our ulema are so rigidly grooved in sectarian terms that for them a universal identity of Islam without sectarian moorings is almost inconceivable. The Abrahamic model of Muslim *haneef* is a thing of the past.

Our dismissal cannot be taken as merely an internal issue. It has set the whole of human history into a crabbed mode. A frank, honest and passionate discussion on the causes of our decline is then the need of the hour. Instead of relying on the wisdom of the dead souls or mindlessly quoting from this scholar or that seer, the time has come to apply our own minds, to look into the Qur'an for a fresh guidance in our modern milieu. Some might consider it abhorrent or even a blasphemy to approach the Qur'an afresh, without solely relying on the great minds of the past. But those aware of the Prophet's primary mission, so explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, to liberate the human mind from all kinds of colonial impulses – the *asr wa aghlaal* – be it intellectual or otherwise, will certainly appreciate this call. The Qur'an does not confer on any person, whosoever they may be, the sole right to interpret God's word. In the Qura'nic *weltanschauung* any attempt to monopolize interpretative activities is highly undesirable and amounts to polytheism. The agency of *Ahbar wa Rahban* is simply unacceptable. Anyone attempting to intercept God's message or for that matter come in between God and man is to be condemned, be he called a Rabbi, an Ahbaar, a Pope, a Maulvi or a Shaikh. No one is authorized to decide whose faith is valid or who can be taken as an authentic Muslim. Leave Muslims alone, the Qur'an warns us against falling into this evil trap, ever. It's God's prerogative, we are told:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصَلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ﴾ [22:17]

# Calling for a New Civilization

The civilization we live in has already peaked and its steep decline is imminent. Call it a western or Faustian civilization which in its present form has almost engulfed the entire globe, its technological prowess lay mainly in the invention of combustion engine and the discovery of fossil fuels. From the industrial revolution to the birth of corporate-capitalism and from the globalized world of internet and marvels of space exploration to the luxury of modern living, the story of western civilization is basically the story of mindless exploitation of gasoline. The Age of Oil has been, for most of us, an awesome time of technological wonders; it radically changed the way we lived, thought or felt. For the first time in human history, our planet supported some six billion people and yet there was abundance of food supplies, we travelled across the globe and even far beyond in space, lived a longer and painless life that the antibiotic and painkillers could ensure and even believed that the solution to all our economic and civilizational ills was to pump out more and yet more oil.

Today when oil is trading at an all time high, a price simply unimaginable a few years ago, we have suddenly awakened to the fact: Lo! ours is an oil-based civilization, without oil this civilization is doomed. And with the depletion of oil reserves and ever growing demand, it does not need a lot of intelligence to conclude that the modern oil civilization as we know it is on a fast track to oblivion. This is not the end-time forecast of an apocalyptic cult but a natural corollary of reasoned thinking.

Let us take a close look. Each litre of bottled water before it reaches our table burns at least double the amount of oil; from its drilling, refining, packaging and transportation to far off places to the use of plastic bottles – again a petrochemical extract. In the US which consumes almost one fourth of the global oil production the situation is much grimmer. According to a 2002 estimate, each calorie of food produced in the US requires at least ten calories of fossil fuels (Dale Allen Pfeiffer, “Eating Fossil Fuels” in *fromthewilderness.com*). Given the heavy dependence of modern food production and management on oil, from pesticides and agro-chemicals to the farming tools like tractors and trailers to irrigation technology and finally to the storage and transportation, such figures are no exaggeration. In the Age of Oil it is a general norm that food stuff, despite being locally available, is imported from far off



lands. Non-alcoholic beer proudly brewed and canned in Holland and Switzerland is consumed in the spiritual comfort of Makkah and Medina. What otherwise should be dubbed as bad planning or unmindful waste of natural resources is mistakenly termed fruits of globalization.

Whatever we lay our hands on we find that it owes fossil fuels for its present shape. From automobiles to computers and from microchip to high-rise buildings, nothing could have been possible without oil. Take for example the case of the microchip and visualise the enormous amount of energy consumed for this small piece of sophistication. According to the American Chemical Society journal *Environmental Science & Technology* (Dec 2002) production of a 32 MB DRAM consumes 3.5 pounds of fossil fuels in addition to 70.5 pounds of water. Joel Garreau explains:

... microchips are not made one by one. They are printed in a batch on a silicon wafer, say, four inches in diameter. Each time a layer of stuff is printed on this silicon wafer, the wafer must be treated so the stuff you've laid on will stay there. This process is achieved through the application of monumental quantities of energy. In effect, as each layer of the circuit is laid on, the whole wafer is 'baked' at temperatures sometimes high enough to reach the outer limits of technology. (*The Nine Nations of North America*, p.276, 1981)

Oil derived products such as plastics, synthetic fibres, synthetic rubber, nitrogen fertilizers and detergents have built a whole new world around us. Be it construction material, PVC's, electronics, furniture, photographic films, pipes, construction material or highly finished material for interior decoration, they are different forms of oil waste. Carpets, curtains, extra-light foams, transparent glasses, swimsuits, water resistant clothing, or fine lingerie, you name any item and you will find it is just another form of polyester or synthetic fibre. The automobile industry is heavily dependent on synthetic rubber and acrylic fibre has substituted wool and cotton in providing clothing and shelter on such a large scale. And without detergent or industrial fertilizer our agriculture simply cannot feed more than six billion people. Oil is not simply energy that keeps our world on the go; petrochemical products are steeped in the making of modern civilization.

Then we have the internet, the biggest machine that the humans ever made. With billions of computers and peripherals scattered all over the world and ever growing server farms, the online virtual reality consumes enormous amounts of energy. Despite the fear that the internet may collapse due to ever increasing number of users, there is a mad race to make almost everything available online. If you are not on the internet you simply do not exist, the maxim goes. Financial institutions, scientific labs, health

care system, the entertainment industry and academia, all are heavily dependent on the internet. And contrary to the common perception, internet infrastructure consumes 9.4% of electricity demand in the U.S. and 5.3% of global demand according to new research from Uclue.com. Given the standard of living in the developed world, J. H. Kunstler in his exciting book *The Long Emergency* estimates that cheap oil has given us the equivalent of three hundred slaves per person. This serfdom however is no longer sustainable.

Depletion of oil then is the decline of oil civilization. Not long ago we discovered and employed petrochemicals to transform almost everything around us. The transformation was bewildering and instant. With the oil wells gone dry our transformation to post-carbon society will also be sudden and devastating. Imagine what will happen to us if the energy flow that we take for granted is put on hold just for a few days. The modern world will crumble. From food supplies to water and sanitation to intra-national institutions; the vanities of oil civilization will cease to exist. Unfortunately, that era is no science fiction; it is now almost at hand.

Oil, the blood of our civilization, is running dry. Over the last hundred years or so from the time we discovered huge amounts of oil and built a civilization around it we have already exhausted about 50% of recoverable oil. With the rapid industrialisation in India, China and other developing nations the race is about who consumes the rest. The American and European experiments have clearly shown that consuming more oil means more industrialisation, more production and hence more prosperity. If a nation of 300 million Americans consumes about one-fourth of the global energy share, imagine what the future holds for the emerging Ch-india which together boast a population of more than two billion people. In the coming years nations will fight to monopolise or get their fair share in whatever is left of oil. The pace of industrialization in south-east Asia will demand more oil, throwing the demand-supply mechanism out of gear. If the the developed nations have consumed half of the world's in over seventy years, the remaining fifty per cent is bound to be consumed in a much shorter span of time, say between twenty-five to thirty years by Asia, adopting American development models. The future is frightening. Are we sleepwalking into a post-carbon era where a new dark age awaits us?

It took some 500 million years for nature to store sun energy in the form of oil. The one-time golden Age of Oil that effectively started during the 1930s will unfortunately come to a close in 2030s, if our present calculations of the known oil reserves are true. Peak-oil theoreticians have long been telling us how soon we are going to hit the peak. As early as in the 1950s geophysicist M. K. Hubbert had rightly

predicted that American oil production would peak in the 1970s. Despite the seriousness of this issue in the past the media played it down because new oil fields were still being discovered. But now the problem is twofold; not only are we going to touch the peak sometime very soon, the discovery of new oil or gas reserves has almost collapsed. The graph is frighteningly in decline; sixteen in 2000, eight in 2001 and none in 2003 (J. H. Kunstler). There are many calculations about the peak. Some believe that world oil production has already peaked in 2006, some point to the year 2008 as the peak year yet others believe that there are still a few more years left. Once we hit the peak, oil production will steadily decline unable to cope up with the rising global demand. Oil prices will steadily increase causing serious financial imbalance. Whether we have touched the peak or are going to touch it soon, what matters most is the remaining half of the world's oil. How we manage it will determine the future of humanity. As competition for oil grows, I'm afraid, nations will find themselves locked in prolong battles that will end only with the end of oil. In 2006 when George W. Bush admitted in his state of the union address: 'America is addicted to oil' he was pointing to a horrific future that 'addicts' can inflict upon the people around receding oil wells in the Middle East. Insiders of the oil industry as they are, Bush and Cheney know well what the future holds for those without oil. Seen in this broader perspective, the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan can help us connect many dots. We are faced with a delicate question: who deserves to survive? With more than 4,000 American lives lost in Iraq and some 29,000 seriously injured, unfortunately, the trading of blood for oil has already begun.

In 2005, I happened to be in Venice for the First World Conference on Future of Science and the topic of discussion that lasted many hours was future energy, more specifically hydrogen fuels. Using hydrogen for our engines can no doubt be alluring but it is far from being a substitute for cheap oil. The same is true of solar panels which cost more energy to create than what they produce. Coal and natural gas are also diminishing and as long as we depended on them we were unable to conceive a civilization like this. At most they can sustain a nineteenth century world model without much of the blessings of the oil civilization. Nuclear energy too is no answer. If the entire world switches over to Uranium its peak can be reached much earlier than the year predicated, 2100. Above all, none of the energy generation sources are oil-free. Winds and waves no doubt are natural sources that we can turn to when not a drop of oil is left but that will be a different time, altogether a different setting.

In the media glut of science f(a)ction the looming danger of a dark age is generally missed. In a new BBC4 series 'Visions of the Future' we hear some of the

best minds in science talking about lab-grown human organs, 3D televisions, human-like robots and the possibility of teleportation. Michio Kaku even believes, and rightly so, that soon we will have the power to animate the inanimate, the power that rested so long with gods. One wonders if our scientists have some practical knowledge of the civilization that made it possible for them to carry on research and thinking in the isolation of most sophisticated oil-powered labs. So far the common mantra, 'come on, by the time oil is over we will find something new', has been a great failure, pushing us almost to the verge of a full-fledged oil-war. Kaku's approach to future energy has been evasive, though galactic in his own eyes. Once we exhaust the planet earth, Kaku tells us, we will look to other planets. He believes that some dead planets might be ready reservoirs of future fuels. To Kaku, our civilization is moving from earthly to planetary to galactic. And if that is the case there should be no point in worrying much about the future of life on this planet. Why should we think of a 'space-age Noah's Ark' on the moon, a library of human civilization in case of a cataclysmic event, as suggested by Jim Burke, a retired NASA expert?

Since Carl Sagan popularized science and brought astrophysics to our drawing rooms, there has been a general trend of talking about future in terms of science fiction. The common man cannot appreciate tough calculations or grim facts and the media finds only those items worthy of reporting that carry a sufficient amount of awe and wonder. Consider the recent BBC4 programme 'Visions of the Future'; we are assured of electricity from nuclear fusion rather than fission in just fifteen to twenty years, nanobots for the battlefield, eradication of cancer, heart disease and other major killing diseases, perfecting and moulding of human body as per our will and above all, bringing aging to a complete stop. An alluring future indeed! Sagan himself always romanticized about billions and billions of galaxies, which he believed were full of life, sending electromagnetic signals to other planets. Sagan enriched our understanding about the cosmos like nobody else, nonetheless, by being too galactical he missed some of the very hard facts that surround each space mission of NASA – a huge amount of money, sometime amounting to a billion dollars or more and an enormous amount of oil. One wonders how our future missions will go to dead planets in search of energy – still cloud in the sky thinking though, when in the coming years nations nations will be fighting for each drop of oil and for their temporary survival. What about bio fuels? Yes, a theoretical possibility. But with the dipping of oil levels when petrochemical fertilisers decline and so do the agricultural produce, we will be faced with this dilemma: to plough for what? food or fuel!

### WHO HIGH JACKED OUR FUTURE?

Riding on the same world or propelling the same civilization will simply accelerate the process of our undoing. And this is what we have been doing for quite sometime. We live in a time about which there is a widespread feeling that it is already over; that something essential has moved out from our being and we live as residue of a civilization past. What we call post-modern; 'an incredulity towards meta-narrative', as described by Jean-Francois Lyotard or, 'the situation the world finds itself in after the breakdown of Enlightenment project' as David Harvey puts it, rightly sums up our predicament. One wonders how we moderns who are very much alive on this planet, can live in post-modern times. But those aware of the civilizational impasse know well that the more we confront a sense of loss and the possibility of an escape diminishing, the more we are struck by inexplicable feelings of an impending doom. Travelling back to historical times when sheer living was an adventure; nature was not used up and life was not a process of instant squeezing, needs a radical dismantling of our thought structure, which at the present is based on sociologism i.e. reduction of thought systems to the personal or group interest of the proponents. We need to create a new paradigm in which the stale worn-out concepts of the last three hundred years of philosophizing are effectively deprived of their defining powers. In short, we need to create new tools for new thinking.

Let me elaborate. The breakdown of the Enlightenment narrative has not gone unnoticed. However, in our criticism of the post-modern we heavily relied on the concepts that had acquired some degree of respectability during the 'enlightened chaos' leading to major upheavals in Europe and which had only one-dimensional fixed meanings. Take for example the term 'civilization' which still obfuscates a humane vision of the future misleading even our seasoned intellectuals to cast the global crisis in 'us' versus 'them' terms. Initially used by Victor Riqueti Mirabeau in *L'Ami des hommes* in 1756, the word civilization was a critique of French absolutism. Gradually it took a life of its own as it developed into an ideology of domination during European expansion. In the nineteenth century, as European nations went out on a 'civilizing mission' they saw no value in other 'inferior' civilizations. Even seemingly objective historiographers like Arnold Toynbee whose *Study of History* has troubled the minds of many generations, was not spared from the evil effects of this imperial propaganda. Toynbee saw western civilization as a continuation of the Roman Empire. While other civilizations were lying stagnant or had got exhausted at lower ledges, according to Toynbee, western civilization had climbed up high and was still able to continue the climb despite its submission to 'false idols' like nationalism and the

religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shall this only civilization then move ahead to establish, rather forcibly, a 'universal state' that the other civilizations failed to achieve in the past? Probably yes. Toynbee's intellectual totalitarianism is difficult to be missed: 'The birth of a civilization is a catastrophe if it is a regression from a previously established church, while the breakdown of a civilization is not a catastrophe if it is the overture to a church's birth'. One wonders if the apocalyptic politics of the neo-cons who are pushing the world to a final Armageddon should be taken as incriminating evidence of the birth of a new church hitherto gone unnoticed.

That we have brought history to a close on our terms and that we are in the final stage of civilizational clash with the barbarian other, are notions born out of the flawed understanding of what we call 'western civilization'. Can we ignore the fact that this time the barbarians other are not outside the city walls ready to attack, they are very much a part of the civilization; now we have a Muslim minister in the UK, a Hindu governor in the US and a very strong contender for the White House from among the Afro-Americans. And, is it justifiable to conceive western civilization exclusively in terms of British, French and German thought especially when each of them has a history of asserting its specific identity and even has gone to war against the others? What are those representative texts on which this civilization has built itself? Are the Muslim states in Europe like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Turkey part of this civilization or do they fall outside of it simply because of their allegiance to Islam? What about the Jews who authored some of the foundation texts like *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* etc.? Is the western civilization a Judeo-Christian venture? Difficult to believe – given the long history of anti-Semitic activism in Europe. Nor can we conceive the Western civilization as a mere post-Christian void as the proponents of the 'Evil Empire' who vehemently opposed it also shared the same civilizational milieu and their sacred text *Das Kapital* was produced in the very epicentre of the idea called 'west'. Western civilization as we know it, then, is nothing but a capitalist prank to highjack a meta-narrative.

After high jacking the grand narratives of history, the capitalists then moved on to canonize some key concepts that were to serve as basic tools of our thinking. The meaning of 'Progress', 'Development', 'Freedom', 'Democracy', in addition to the misguided civilizational yardsticks like 'free-market economy', 'gender equality', 'per capita income', 'gross domestic produce' etc became one-dimensional and fixated. This enabled the capitalist cranks to envision a world of their choice without any significant

opposition. The 'captains of industry' as they are generally referred to, a title which hides their exploitative acumen, Carnegie and Rockefeller, whom the US government committed huge tracks of land as collateral to build railroads, were actually acting on behalf of the powerful Rothschilds in London. No doubt they meticulously built the infrastructure, but they also took effective measures to lay, inside our minds, a replica of their own thinking. Both of them created huge educational endowments that were to control the American university system and the direction of future research projects. While scientific research was to feed the military-industry nexus, social sciences were employed to advance the grand American narrative. In fact, it was mainly through the coercive efforts of such endowments the capitalist vocabulary got canonized.

With the canonization of key civilizational concepts and the iron-fist grip of plutocracy on state apparatus the American model of development became the ultimate yardstick. The Cold War victory, emergence of a united Europe and the free-market reform of India and China made the American narrative unstoppable. The uncontrolled growth of economies and the rising standards of living that blinded us for almost half a century were mainly due to the burning of oil which we got at a price almost free. Employing more technology at our service and stretching production capacity to its full suited the capitalist who through acquisition of cheap oil had highjacked our civilization. Pumping out more oil guaranteed economic prosperity and ensured the growing coffers of the capitalist who controlled and commanded the oil civilization. But now when the oil wells are running dry and we are digging deeper and further deep the fear of a post-carbon age is so real that despite the scarcity of refineries no one is interested in establishing new refineries as they know that in the future there will be less oil to refine.

Where do we go from here? Probably no one knows. Mathew Simons, energy adviser to Bush once conceded that 'the situation is desperate'. In an interview with an online magazine *From the Wilderness* (Aug 2003) he called it the 'world's biggest question' on which the politicians had no plan-B to fall back on. Universities and think-tanks should have a role in suggesting a way out from this impasse. But the capitalist iron-fist on academia has left very little room for alternative or independent thinking. Universities do not encourage thinking anymore, they serve as training grounds for the corporate world. In a buzzing globalized technopolis in which oil has transformed the world around us, civilization gurus need people to work on computers rather than allowing them to 'waste' their time and energy in philosophic reflection about future. The breakdown of academia and the emergence of a knowledge industry in its place have created a whole lot of 'toy-geniuses' who can neither afford the luxury

of thinking nor are they equipped with basic linguistic tools essential for such a task. Corporate-oriented education has produced one-dimensional men whose motto is maximization of wealth. At their best, the toy-geniuses can talk of runaway greenhouse gases, carbon emission, lack of clean water, organic food and sanitation. First they plundered natural resources, polluted our lands, rivers and springs and now they are out to provide us with safe drinking water, pesticide-free organic food and clean air. Even the dissenters of western civilization, as the Environmentalists and the peace activists are seen to be, make a lot out of the lack of sanitation in some third world countries where alternative living is the norm. One wonders if civilization is all about flush-toilets.

### WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?

Whether we believe the advocates of peak-oil or find solace in the optimism expressed by industry leaders, it would be suicidal to keep the energy issue out of public debate. In his address to the Third OPEC International Seminar in 2006, Abdallah Jum'ah, President and CEO of Saudi Aramco, consoled the world that if his expectations about the industry are met, there can be a similar flow of oil at least for another 140 years. Jum'ah's projections were mainly based on the premise of future technological wonders for discovering new oil fields, extracting the proven reserves to the last drop and using non-conventional heavy oil resources. Jum'ah is not unaware of the environmental fallout out of processing heavy oil and deep-down extractions. Couched in a language that stands somewhere between rhetoric and corporate dream, Jum'ah's ambitious projections and his expectations from future technology escape tough calculations. The issue here is not which side of the debate we are on; whether we should panic or feel eased up. There are yet other urgent concerns and hard facts which I would like to incorporate into this discourse.

Of the twenty most significant oil producing countries which account for 95% of total proved reserves, twelve are home to the Islamic Ummah which together make some 67% of the total world oil reserves. As for the proved reserves of natural gas, Muslim countries have more than 50% of the global share, Iran and Qatar being the major reserves after Russia. And fossil fuel is not all that we have been entrusted with. The Muslim nation, which accounts fifty seven strategically located countries on this planet and which now has a significant presence in the heartlands of other civilizations, has also been entrusted with the Last Revelation, the unadulterated message of God to humanity. The presence of such a vast amount of energy resources in the Muslim lands, especially in the *Jaziratul Arab*, is not without a divine plan. It is a very special



bounty, an *amanah*, a trust in the hands of those assigned to lead humanity until the End-time. The Qur'an reprimands us of the bounties of God and of the delicate balance:

﴿الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ  
حُسْبَانٍ وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا  
فِي الْمِيزَانِ وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ﴾ [55:1-9]

God – the most gracious. It is He who has taught the Qur'an. He created man, endowed him with power of expression. The Sun and the Moon follow courses computed; and the herbs and the trees both bow in adoration. And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the balance, in order that you may not transgress balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. [55:1-9]

The balance or *al-mizaaan* is one of the most Qur'anic defining concepts. In the verses that follow we are reminded, time and again, of the various bounties of God spread all across the planet, in the land and the sea, and also what awaits us in the hereafter. Amidst the most melodious refrain 'which and which bounties of your Lord would you deny', we are commanded not to tamper with the balance. The world no doubt is made for us. But plundering its resources or depriving others of their rightful share would disturb man's happy relation with nature and with his own self. *Al-mizaaan* is more than a symbol of judicial justice. It is intended to preserve the delicate balance which governs the computed course of the Sun and the Moon and ensures the health of the phenomenal world, which according to the Qur'an is continuously on the grow–

﴿كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ﴾ [55:29]

Those who are mindful of 'the delicate balance' that amounts to help establish a just order and take care of the environmental delicacies are assured of a double reward. A harmonious living with nature turns this world itself into a heaven. Eventually, they emerge as a people of two heavens and much more

﴿وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّاتٌ﴾ [55:46]

As upholders of the Last Revelation and trustees of the world's fossil fuel we have a very unique obligation to God and mankind. Together with Islam and Oil, we hold the key to future. Should we disrupt the flow of oil the entire world would come to a stand still. We have already performed a similar experiment when a few centuries ago,

on the pretext of interpretative codification, we mistakenly severed our ties with the comforting message of God thus leaving the entire world to grope in darkness. Consequently, the delicate balance or the *mizaaan* between man and nature got tampered with bringing the world to near collapse, the result: environmental imbalance, piling up of the toxic wastes, lack of organic food, clean air and water and worst of all, an ever widening gap between the haves and have-nots. Today, the individual is over-burdened and hard-pressed under the tax-system and there is virtually no free space left. Whether we like it or not, we are forced to pay for the ill-conceived defense spending, in most cases for victimization to the glory called man. With the emergence of oil civilization, as oil got into the wrong hands, man's victimization by man touched an all-time high. Never before in history has man had invented such sophisticated weapons to kill fellow humans and called it 'collateral damage'.

The oil civilization, as it developed in the West, has brought us unending woe. With the eventual triumph of plutocracy and the ever-rising tide of corporate capitalism, the process of doom has further accelerated. Should we pump out more oil to support this directionless civilization and perpetuate what man has made of man or, should we behave as more accountable trustees? Upholders of the Last Revelation as we claim to be, we Muslims have an obligation to future generations. Those who have yet to surface on this planet, they too have a right to inherit a healthy world. The unmindful burning of oil in the name of globalization is ethically, politically and rationally wrong. Does it make any sense for a packet of food to travel a thousand kilometres before it reaches our table or, for us to travel long hours to the place of work every day? Mineral water claimed to be bottled from the springs of Himalaya is transported to Chennai and far beyond. Tea-leaves grown in Darjeeling are first exported to Britain from where they are re-exported across the world and also to the country of their origin. The UK and Holland are not the only countries who regularly indulge in exporting, and at the same time, importing to each other poultry and meat products. The list is endless. When the supermarket shelves boast of a single product from very many places, we call it the fruits of globalization, while in effect it is the burning of extra oil, a sheer madness.

### A NEW CIVILIZATION

Putting aside oil alone which is far more a precious thing, a non-renewable source of energy, the Prophet had commanded us not even to waste water long before 'save water' became a fashionable environmentalist's slogan. Before the oil wells run dry we

must come forward to convince people of the necessity of sane living. We need to forge an alliance with other faith communities who share our concern. It is time to be aggressively proactive, to convince our fellow humans that mad burning of oil and at such an ever-increasing pace, is simply suicidal. There is no other alternative but to change the way we live. A new civilization should be our minimum goal.

In a world where the obsolete capitalist model for development still holds sway, where nations are still competing to erect the tallest building on this planet, the call for a New Civilization may initially fall on deaf ears. Recently, Kuwait has unveiled plans to build a one thousand meter high architectural *Alf-Lailah* and in Jeddah Prince Waleed is planning to build Burj Al-Meel or the Mile High Tower which is expected to cost \$ 10 billion. Burj Dubai, so far the tallest building on this planet which overtook Taipei 101 tower, is now facing threat from another competitor who plans to build Al-Burj. As long as the capitalist notion of civilization remains operative and we judge our progress by towers and toilets, it would be difficult to chart out the course of an alternative civilization.

# Reinterpreting Islam

A feeling of being 'post' has gripped the world of Islam. It appears to many of us that we are living in an age of agonizing boredom when history is wrapping itself up and when momentous events are not taking place any more. Our alluring achievements of the past, when our history was at its zenith and when we enjoyed the Golden Age wherein the pious elders perfected the process of thinking, have left almost no role for us in any future scheme of things. In short, our future history, as we conceive it today, is no more than an empty shell of a used cartridge.

We Muslims alone are not guilty of eulogizing the past, however if the past has a deadening effect on us it is mainly because as compared to other nations we look at it as sacrosanct and not as a process of enlightening experimentations. I shall elaborate. Terminologies such as *ta'bein* and *tabe'ta'bein* that we once coined to express a historical phenomenon soon became a stumbling block in the very process of historical analysis. Such is the bane of terminologies. Instead of encapsulating the essence of a phenomenon they have come to control our perception and thinking. Western historiographers classify different periods of their history with terms such as Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution etc. These words may represent the dominant mood of the time nonetheless they do not capture the sum total of the intellectual activity of a given period. Looking at history through these labels would amount to looking at the past essentially through someone else's eyes. In present times, however terminologies are breaking apart. They are no more able to capture the essence of an age. For example, what we call today 'post-modern' is a highly complex phenomenon; a jumble of conflicting trends leading to unknown destinations. In a word, post-modernism is like pulling out the carpet from beneath a civilization. Take for example the long cherished ideals of chivalry, courage and manliness. Not long ago revolutionary leaders, spiritual seers, sportsmen and soldiers were seen as almost super human for their extraordinary valor and courage. But now the invention of wonder drugs and performance enhancing pills has robbed them of their romantic appeal. Technology has brought us to a complete mess. As compared to the world of crumbling values of a 'Waste Land' where a Prufrock may not express his love, today we are confronted with a cold-eyed world infested with divorced women

and hook-ups. The post-modern self, as expressed in western street poetry, may celebrate the independence and autonomy of what it calls 'iPod Lone Rangers' but it can hardly mask its anxiety and boredom and the total confusion when it comes to relationships. I-Pod and cell-phones are no more symbols of individual freedom rather they have become the albatrosses of the directionless civilizational voyage.

In the West, prefixing the word 'post' to anything meaningful, from post-Christianity to post-Modernism is a strange way of depriving a concept of its meaning. If the main events of history are over and we are born at the twilight of the last day, there is no way to enjoy life at its full. It is the residue of life that surrounds a post-modern self. A life devoid of natural flavor, as it has come down to us, turns the individual into a mere consumer where he hardly finds any meaning in life. The mad Monday, as they call it, keeps us chasing to get ready to do the same thing again and yet again. Living a life that we do not want with the implication that it is too late to look for a life that is meaningful.

Unlike the West where post-era murmurings and end of history fears are a natural corollary of a directionless rush, in the Muslim world this feeling emanates from a wrong perception of history. In the heyday of Islamic empire when the great *fuqaha* and theologians were debating about the canons of Islamic faith, they thought it natural to turn to the early generation of scholars known for their knowledge of the prophetic time. In their search for a commonly acceptable version of the faith they heavily relied on the interpretative methodology of the elders. Had they relied solely on the revelation and the prophetic model (*uswah*), it would have been possible for the later generations to approach the text on their own. In that case they would have been a stepping stone for us and not a stumbling block. But the early centuries were also marked by political upheavals and intellectual disorder of an unprecedented magnitude that forced the ulema to lay down a commonly agreed charter of faith. خير القرون قرني ثم الذين يلونهم ثم الذين يلونهم only reinforced the belief that the first three generations hold key to Islamic interpretation. Few then were able to realise that this methodology had a direct bearing on the Jewish hermeneutical tradition which places *Tanaim*, *Amorim* and *Saborim*, the three Talmudic generations, at the helm of interpretative activities. And much like the Jews we too created an aura of sacredness around *sahaba*, *ta'bein* and *tab'a ta'bein*. It was here that the seed of a church was sown in Islam which soon paved the way for a full-fledged Vaticanization of a simple faith.

Can a specific period in history be called sacred? If the first three generations of Muslims lived in sacred times (*khairul quroon*), as the tradition would like us to believe, what about the other prophets in history? Do they fall below, after the *tabein*

and *tab'tabein*, in the chronological order? The idea of sacred times has a Christian connotation where Christ's presence on earth is seen as unfolding the word of God. To believe that a specific time is sacred is problematic on many counts. It gives undue importance to an entire generation for simply having lived in a specific period ignoring the fact that within the same prophetic period and inside the prophet's City of Enlightenment save the second and third generations of Muslims there also lived a host of hypocrites, polytheists and idolaters. We also know that a significant amount of intellectual activity in different parts of the early Islamic empire was carried out by those who were not happy with the new situation. Amidst *tabein* and *tab'tabein*, so eulogised for their close proximity to the prophetic time, also lived fabricators of traditions and storytellers who were to influence the shape of Islam in the time to come.

In the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*, the foundation of Islamic faith was well laid out during the prophet's time:

﴿الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا﴾ [5:3]

This vision of Islam was to serve as a model for all successive generations. The Siddiqi model of Islam might appear a little different from the Islam of the Prophet's time and the Omerian model may bear a different look from the Siddiqi model owing to the changing context, but they are a continuation of the same process. If Caliph Omer had the right to overturn certain precedents of the Prophet's and the Siddiqian periods, as he did on many occasions, the future Muslims too will have the right to envision an Islam most suited to their own times. A message for all times and places as Islam claims itself to be, no specific generation can claim monopoly on the word of God. Our predecessors who tried their best to emulate the prophetic message had had their share of the revelation. It would be demeaning on our part to rely solely on their understanding of the revelation instead of partaking of the revelation itself.

The idea that interpretative activities have come to a stop and an orthodox version of faith has taken a shape for all time to come essentially emanates from the long held confusion in the Muslim mind which often mixes message with history. We must understand that historical Islam, as it has come down to us, is a transitional stage of the prophetic message that in future has to culminate in a divine thread bringing together submitters of all traditions, singing in unison the glory of one God. Orthodoxy by its very definitions relies on history and not on the simple message itself. For example, as opposed to Shia Islam which does not consider the first three caliphs legitimate, Sunni Islam places the four caliphs at the centre of faith. The same is true of the four *fuqaha* who rose to prominence due to the socio-political conditions of the

time. Accepting them as what they have been made into, or not, can hardly have a bearing on our faith. Then there are also a number of Hadith compendiums. Compiled in the fourth century, some of them have acquired the status of canon literature as they are devoutly called the *sehad sitta*. A product of history as they are, their rejection should not cast a shadow on our faith, but allowing it to do so will make the entire structure of Sunni Islam crumble. Shia Islam too rests on a similar canonization of history. The basic creed that differentiates it from Sunni Islam, such as the divine origin of Imamate where Ali and his progeny have a designated role, is quite a late development. As late as the middle of the third century hijra when Bukhari and Muslim were collecting traditions, there were no separate books for Shia and Sunni traditions. That is why we come across many of what we now consider essentially Shia traditions in Bukhari and Muslim. If we can do away with the misgivings of history and roll back historical Islam, this process will trigger the end of both Sunni and Shia Islam. Then alone will we be in a position to re-envision the prophetic message without any historical intervention.

It is the 'historical Islam' that we have been upholding so proudly and for so long. Developed and perfected in history, as it were, it tells us that the pious elders have perfected the process of thinking, that history is not negotiable, and a critical look at the canon period is simply unthinkable. If the four great *fuqaha* of the past have really finalized a code of living for all time and if the so called canonical period spanning the first three generations is not negotiable, our encounter with the revelation can only be illusory, we will be struggling with the frozen words which spoke to our predecessors long back in history. For many centuries the Muslims have found themselves in a constant fix; on the one hand the Qur'an exhorts them to focus on the revelation

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ﴾ [47:24]

while on the other hand, historical Islam tells them that any encounter with the revelation pointing to a direction different from that of the pious elders is simply not acceptable.

To my understanding, the message of Islam is constantly on the grow; as human society evolves so does the intent of revelation. There are many verses in the Qur'an about the human embryo which today we are in a better position to appreciate than our predecessors whose knowledge of medical sciences was scanty. I have no hesitation to say that the ideals of prophetic Islam have yet to manifest in full. A global society embracing submitters of different hues based on the principles of liberty and justice for which prophets of God strove in different periods of history and which was given a final push by the prophet Muhammad himself is yet to be realised. This unfinished

agenda has to be carried out by the followers of the Last Prophet. This is to say that the changing models of Islam, from the essential or 'basic' to the Siddiqi and to the Omerian, will eventually culminate in the realization of a full bloom prophetic model.

Such statements however should not delude us into believing that the future model of Islam will be an improvement upon the Siddiqi or Omerian model. Logistically, it may have an edge over the previous models but in essence it will be a continuation of the same process. Like their predecessors the future Muslims too will have their share in the prophetic mission. But for this to happen, the monopoly of the first three generations on the revelation must end. Instead of waiting for a messiah or a hidden imam, the present generation of Muslims must claim their share in the enlightening words of God. This alone can redeem us from the sheer emptiness and non-events that surround us today. As long as the Jewish and Christian nations celebrated their inactivity and waited for a messiah, they lived in an intellectual prison house of their own making. There was no role for them at the centre stage. But once they came out of the mythical world, they found a whole new vista open to them. It took a considerable amount of time on their part to realize what they were clinging to, and had been for so long, was a false religiosity. Rabbinic Judaism and Pauline Christianity, as these nomenclatures suggest, are essentially human constructs of religious experiences. They cannot be conceived of without their early scholars or clergy. Rabbinic Judaism calls for building an impregnable fence around the Torah. On the contrary, the Qur'an wants to demolish all such fences that the clergy have ever built around it. In the Christian *weltanschauung*, walking out of the mythical world of a future redeemer has simply meant forsaking religion itself. This indeed has been a painful situation generally termed as post-Christianity. Walking out of the historical constructs of Islam however will not lead us to a similar chaos as in that case we will find ourselves amidst the enlightening, comforting words of God.

Historical Islam must give way to critical thinking if we are serious about reinvigorating our religious life. Revival of Islam in our time should not mean a return to the medieval feel that unfortunately many of us think as its logical outcome. This misconception has deprived us of our originality, turning the entire spectrum into a pastiche. We do but we do not. There lies around us a buzzing world of religious activities: mosques full of worshippers, annual Haj gatherings ever on the rise; the holy Harems in Makkah and Medina constantly in expansion; the jihadis out to turn the world upside down; and the pacifists busy to take the message of God to every nook and corner, to recreate, yet again another utopia. But the outcome is frustrating, rather depressing. It appears as if it is a pastiche world where we are parodying the pious elders,



unwittingly trying to recreate a medieval world in a modern setting. Take, for example, the Friday congregation which as a religious institution had played an instrumental role shaping the Ummah. Today when the Imam reads out an Arabic sermon from an old book composed during the days of Muslim rule and exhorts the believers to obey the just imam, he not only sounds completely out of tune with the time he also makes us feel that we live in a pastiche world. An Islam based on secondary sources can only create pastiche. Our intellectual heritage spanning some twelve hundred years or so is a pathetic reflection of this pastiche-mindset where similar ideas are woven generation after generation in multi-volume compendiums. For many centuries our intellectual activity has hovered around classical works and we rely solely on medieval minds as we consider the formative period of historical Islam somehow sacred and a direct access to the Qur'an a blatant disrespect to the great masters of the past.

In principle, scholars of Islam agree that a direct access to the Qur'an, a fresh reading of the text, is very much desirable. Some of them even call for a semi-autonomous reading of the text, i.e., a reading based on Hadith reportage. Their willingness to go beyond the orthodoxy is indicative of the fact that the 'three-generation Islam' is falling short of contemporary challenges. However, despite so much ho-ha about a fresh reading it is not easy for them to concede that a new reading may command us to take new positions on a host of issues. If the words of God are unfrozen and allowed to speak yet again we would find ourselves amidst a new revolution; that same sublime feel when God had intervened in history through His prophetic agency.

A re-reading of the text will bring us face to face with the pristine purity of the Islamic message. We will be in a position to conceive Islam without history, without the misgivings of the past generations. Today, our efforts at fresh reading are generally aborted by traditional understanding which though in blatant violation of the Qur'anic intent has been upheld for so long that now it appears to be an auxiliary revelation. Take for example the Qur'anic verse:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا  
 إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ۗ﴾ [49:13]

If piety is the sole criteria, what is the rationale of investing the leadership in the tribe of Quraish, as traditions would like us to believe: الأئمة من القريش. The Qur'an tells us time and again that for each individual is what he earns

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ۗ﴾ [74:38]

and that man has no share in what he does not earn through his hard work

﴿ وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى ﴾ [53:39]

But the traditional understanding of Islam makes us believe that family lineage alone can be a sufficient ground for one's supremacy. An independent reader of the Qur'an is taken aback when finds that contrary to the Qur'anic statement –

﴿ مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ <sup>٥</sup> ﴾

﴿ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴾ [33:40]

– which clearly demonstrates that absence of a male progeny has left no room for any one to claim descent from the Prophet Muslims have found in the progeny of Ali the royal family of Islam. A re-reading of the text will help recover Islam from the blatant racialism that it acquired during the Fatimid rule as it will also clear the intellectual haze that has been continuously getting thicker with the passage of time.

A creative reading of the text in the contemporary setting however cannot be totally risk-free. The journey, both in time and space, from seventh century Arabia to our globalized world, is no small challenge. It is like intermittently changing the gear, or continuously shuttling between the two worlds. We need a highly imaginative mind to properly adjust to the changing context and a responsive soul to appreciate the intent. Yet the result could at times be difficult to establish. Take for example the issue of inheritance. In a traditional patriarchal society where woman was not supposed to shoulder any financial responsibility and where she was not seen as a breadwinner, it was more than justified that she inherit less than her brother. Today social structures have radically changed. In big cities, and especially in the West, woman is doing as much as her male counterparts. In most cases she leads an independent life, takes complete financial responsibility and carries her own cross. Shall she still inherit less than her brother? Can we discriminate against her simply for being a female? If Caliph Omer can suspend the Qur'anic *hadd* of amputating one's hand for theft in the days of famine and yet he can be held in high esteem as upholder of justice and guardian of Islamic faith, there is no reason why we should stick to the same patriarchal understanding of inheritance laws. Every text has only a relative meaning. A maximum meaning can only be discerned in the context. This is the predicament of language in which meaning is never absolute.

I understand that a jump from the Prophet's Arabia to modern times is no easy task. There is enough probability that in our efforts to reach the divine intent we may err. But God Almighty, who certainly knows our limitations more than we do, exhorts us to accept this challenge. Do we dare say Him a 'No'?

# Rethinking Ijtihad

For too long we Muslims have been pinning all our hopes on the revival of ijtihad. There is a widespread feeling that ijtihad or the process of reinterpreting the canon text that was put on hold after the sack of Baghdad in 1258, if reinvigorated, can redeem the Ummah from the present impasse. Revival of ijtihad has been the rallying cry for the entire intellectual activity of the Ummah during the last three hundred years or so. From Waliullah of Delhi and his Arabian counterpart Mohammad bin Abdulwahab to Jamaluddun Afghani and his Egyptian disciples and then to Muhammad Iqbal, the list is impressive. Yet it is a fact that the door of ijtihad still remains closed and no major intellectual breakthrough is in sight.

Ijtihad is basically a *fiqhi* concept. The idea that a new ijtihad can redeem our ills is mainly due to our misgivings about the nature of the crisis which in essence is an intellectual one. So far we have been conveniently ignoring the fact that the traditional institution of ijtihad that we so vociferously call for to revive is, in reality, an extension of the same *fiqhi* closed mindset, as it demands any fresh thinking to be in conformity with the conclusions drawn by our predecessors.

Let us explain. Many centuries have elapsed since Wasil bin Ata, the great Mutazali, laid out a rationalist methodology wherein he placed three other pivots along with the revelation as the basic tools of intellectual enquiry. In Wasil's quest for truth revelation was not the ultimate authority rather it was one of the four pillars, the other three being Hadith (the reportage), *ijma* (consensus) and *qayas* (analogical reasoning). Ijtihad which falls under the broader category of *qayas* is in a way an essential component of the traditional worldview. If the new interpreters of Islam failed in the past in igniting new thinking, it was mainly because they had taken the four pillars of *fiqh* as given and hence they never dared challenge this canon. The methodological ambiguities that they encountered were on two counts; firstly, traditions or extra information spanning centuries of *fiqhi* canonization became an impregnable fence around the revelation; secondly, elevation of Hadith, *ijma* and *qayas* to the level of revelation created a halo of sacredness around the *fiqhi* methodology which was basically a rationalist human construct of the time. As the four pillars of *fiqh* were viewed as given nobody ever bothered to challenge the basic principles on which the

*fiqhi* mind rests. The orthodox Muslim mind, of which *ijtihad* is just a part, has been shaped over the centuries. Besides the four principles of *fiqh*, there were many other additions to it from divergent sources.

It goes without saying that the traditional Islam is a mix of message and history. The universal message of Islam is still available within the covers of the Qur'an. But the Qur'an is no longer the only source. Instead we have many compendiums of *fiqh*, writings of the mystics and volumes of exegetical writings that shape and control our vision of Islam. *Ijtihad*, as the traditional understanding goes, has to work within the confines of what has been canonized in course of history. No wonder then that the very idea of a *Mujtahid Mutlaq* (original interpreter) is so abhorrent for the exponents of *ijtihad*.

The early history of Islam that we so proudly glorify as the age of Pious Elders (*salf saleheen*) was also marred by internecine conflicts, the *fitnah*. The War of Riddah, the murder of Othman, the battles of Jamal and of Siffin took place during the very first generation of Muslims. Those who founded the Ummid and Abbasid empires thereby altering the roots of the Islamic polity lived also during the same canon period. Our historians have made us believe that despite the changing Muslim polity the dynasties were upholders of the Islamic mission. They were afraid lest any critical evaluation of the early Muslim society should depict pure Islam as a short-lived phenomenon. It was mainly for this reason that they projected the Ummayyids, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Mughals in India and the Ottoman Turks as the guardians of Islamic mission. This created serious methodological problems for Muslim historiographers as they considered it their religious obligation to depict the early Muslims as super-humans nay, rather angels. Had the Muslim historiographers done their job properly it would have been easier for us to realize that each generation of believers had its own strength and weakness and that the purpose of the prophetic mission was to create a society of humans and not of angels. The early Muslims whom we eulogize as pious elders were also humans like us. If we look at them as such it may be possible for us to appreciate how they understood the divine intent for their own specific settings. Their shortcomings may not appear to us then as intellectual detours and we will be in a position to rectify their mistakes in the light of revelation. In short, we can lay a similar claim on revelation as the early Muslims did. But unfortunately this is no longer possible for the orthodox mind as the history itself has been subject to canonization. Historical Islam that has shaped Muslim orthodoxy demands from us that we accept along with the prophetic mission a full load of historical baggage. To accept the four caliphs as rightly guided, the four schools of *fiqh* as part of the divine scheme and among the Shias, the twelve or seven imams as divinely ordained are viewed

as expressions of orthodoxy. Historiography has left little choice for us to readjust our vision of orthodoxy. One glaring example is the omission in our canonized history books of Abdullah bin Zubair's khilafa who ruled a major part of the Islamic empire for almost a decade and who enjoyed much more political legitimacy than Abdul Malik, the Umayyad caliph. Any rethinking within the orthodox ambit then can be fatal.

Wasil's four principles that were instrumental in shaping the orthodoxy had also a social context. Wasil was a known Mu'tazli, a rationalist per se – a typical product of an age when Greek philosophy and logic had created havoc in the Muslim mind. Hair-splitting theological debates about the Muslim creed had given birth to many divergent sects; *marja'iyyah*, *jabriyyah*, *qadriyyah*, *mutaezelah* etc. Even the Qur'an, the very epitome of revelation, was not spared from this discussion. Was the Qur'an 'created' words or 'eternal'? How did the 'divine intent' get transformed into human language? What relation does the 'word of God' have with logos as used in the Christian context? Such questions only hampered the supremacy of revelation over other sources of knowledge. In Wasil's *weltanschauung* one encounters, probably for the first time, a Muslim rationalist arguing that the truth can be ascertained not by the Qur'an alone, but equally so by sunnah, *ijma* and *qiyas*. Very soon Wasil's four principles of ascertaining the truth came in vogue. So much so, when the great *fuqaha* started writing books on principles of jurisprudence they found the 'four principles' so natural that they incorporated them as such, little realizing that this rationalist methodology had placed revelation at par with other humanly derived sources. In Wasil's *weltanschauung* revelation had to make sense not on its own but under strict guidance of sunnah, *ijma* and *qayas*. The 'four principles' that have been controlling the fiqhi discourse from day one are inherently problematic. Firstly, among the *fuqaha*, the Book of God is not the one definitive Qur'an that we find in every Muslim home today but it also includes variant readings which provide enough scope for exegetical manoeuvring. Secondly, sunnah has been an ever-changing concept, a loosely defined term which sometimes also includes practices of the early Muslims. Thirdly, *ijma* is a false metaphor as no *ijma* has ever taken place on any single issue and the scholars have debated whether *ijma* of the past scholars can be taken as sacred. Fourthly, as for *qayas* which is a broader term for *istehsan*, *istislah*, *masaleh mursala* and under which also comes *ijtihad*, it has always been a bone of contention among *fuqaha* of conflicting schools. These then are the four principles of *fiqh* that have imprisoned the *fiqhi* mind for centuries.

In our intellectual history there were many instances when our reformers tried to break away from *ijma* and *qayas*. But the zaheri and the salafi schools despite their insistence on the text, their rejection of *ijma* and *qayas* and their distaste for the

*fuqaha*, could not make any significant headway. Their failure was partly due to their heavy reliance on historical reportage (Hadith) and partly due to lacking the courage to breakaway from the orthodox *fiqhi* mould. True, they abhorred the idea of following an Abu Hanifa or a Shafei but willingly submitted themselves to the reporters of *Sehah Sitta*. Probably they had the delusion that their reliance on the reportage of the prophetic era had made them closer to the true understanding of the text. But in the books of Hadith they also encountered traditions which appeared in direct contravention to the 'text' and which were deemed unfit for practice. For example, in *Sahih Muslim* one encounters a reportage about *muta* and prayer tablets, both still being practiced by the Shias. Had the compilers of the traditions unwittingly given undue importance to the transmitters of these traditions, they quipped. Then there were other equally disturbing reports which by no counts could be considered practicable in any civilized society. For example, there were traditions telling us that if a person wants to allow a *ghair mahram* male an easy access to his home, he should ask his wife or his mother-in-law to allow him to have five sucks of her milk. This action, we were told, will convert him into a close relative thus enabling him to drop by into the house as a family member. Imam Ahmed and Imam Muslim have reported a similar incident about Abu Huzaifa. Once Abu Huzaifa's wife asked the Prophet: 'O prophet of Allah! Salim is a regular visitor to our house. He is an adult and Abu Huzaifa does not like his frequent coming.' To this the Prophet is reported to have said: 'feed him your milk so as to enable him to enter your house with all ease.' It is also said that when Ayisha wanted someone to frequent her house she would usually ask her sister Umme Kulsoom or any of her nieces to feed him five sucks.

Those who had taken the books of traditions at par with the revelation and their transmitters as Gabriel, it was not easy for them to reject such absurd traditions altogether. Despite their rejection of *ijma* and *qayas* the Ahl-al-Hadith movement could not make headway as it found itself trapped in the web of irreconcilable and conflicting traditions. Ibn Taimiyah, Ibn Hazm and lately Ibn Abdulwahab and Waliullah, all of them though rebelled against the traditional mindset, none of them was able to break the *fiqhi* mould. No doubt, they downplayed *fiqhi ijma* to some extent and strongly condemned *qayas* but dared not question interpretative role of the traditions. History, as it has come down to us through the transmitters of Hadith, remained a sacred zone for them. Believing in the history was essential if they were to follow in the footsteps of the pious elders, the *salaf*. The salafi reformers in a way conveniently ignored the basic perplexing question: if being so faithful to the *salaf* was a precondition to faith, where was the room for any *ijtihad* then?

Breaking the *fiqhi* mould or making a dent on traditional thinking, in effect, is the first step to *ijtihad*. And if we are aware that the *fiqhi* mould is not God-ordained rather it is more a product of history, it may be easier for us to do so. The formative period of *fiqh* was an age when the Greek inquisitive methodology was in vogue. Intellectual centers in the Muslim lands were also exposed to Christian theological and ontological issues. The very debate about the supposed 'createdness of the Qur'an' was basically a by-product of Muslim response to the 'logos'. For the new converts to Islam it was natural to make sense of the new religion through their familiar terminologies and institutions. Later when the Islamic seminaries sprang up throughout the Muslim world and, the private ulema assumed the role of interpreters of Islam, it became customary for them to grant their students *ijazah*, much like *semikha* of the Jews. To a great extent, the emergence of clergy in Islam owes to the Jewish rabbinic tradition where a *responsa* (*fatwa*) was seen as a divine intent. As the later rulers, the *ulul amr*, were no longer in spiritual command, the masses had no other option but to turn to the private ulema for matters religious. This provided an encouraging atmosphere for many divergent and often conflicting pictures of Islam to emerge. Within less than two centuries, we hear of people talking about the supposed seventy-two heretical sects in Islam. The situation became so chaotic that a commonly agreed definition of Islam became the need of the hour. Abul Hassan Ash'ari who among many others tried to work out a synthesis of many prevailing trends successfully checked the onslaughts of the Mu'tazila movement. Nevertheless, Ash'arism which was purely a contextual response of the time, thank to the efforts of Ghazali (d.505 AH) and Razi (d.606 AH), gradually assumed so much prestige that the later ulema took it almost as the Nicene Creed of Islam. In *Kitab al-Ibana un Usool ad-Deyanah* along with the Book of God, the sunnah of the Prophet, the precedents of his companions and the insights of the scholars of Hadith, Ash'ari has specifically made mention of Ahmed bin Hanbal to whom, as he tells us, God has given the true understanding of religion to guide the people and undo the innovations and schism. Ash'ari's reliance on Ibn Hanbal makes at least one thing clear; that even the ulema of formative period who played a key role in shaping the *fiqhi* mould were averse to any critical evaluation of the great masters. The triumph of Ash'arism over Mu'tazilite and other shades of Islam was not because in it one found the pristine purity of prophetic message but simply because it got influential advocates like Ghazali and Razi. As it happens in every battle of ideas, both Ash'ari and Ghazali faced strong opposition in their own times; the former received condemnation from the pulpit of the mosques and latter's books were burnt across the

world of Islam. But today Ash'ari is generally seen as the guardian of faith and Ghazali is reverently called *Hujjatul Islam*.

Pure philosophy, other than the *Kalam*, was yet another element in shaping orthodoxy. During the Abbasid era, a Lebanese Christian published an Arabic translation of the *Enneads* of Plotinus that soon became a point of reference to prove one's intellectual sophistication. Historians have recorded that the book was held in such a high esteem as if it were another Qur'an. For almost four hundred years philosophy and *kalam* operated in two different spheres; the former was the domain of secular intellectuals while the latter was popular among the traditional ulema. However, in the latter centuries this dividing line became blurred as philosophy became the defender of faith as well as its destroyer. Philosophy which was on the margin of intellectual discourse during the time of Al-Kindi (d.870) and Al-Farabi (873-950) assumed the center stage thanks to the efforts of Ibn Sina whose explanation of the 'first cause' accorded it some sort of legitimacy. Ibn Hazm (965-995) and Ghazali (1057-1111) successfully employed it to the service of faith. Ibn Rushd went a step further as he argued that as compared to others, the philosophers were more qualified to interpret the Qur'an.

No analysis of the traditional mould can be comprehensive without mentioning the mystics of Islam whose influence is enormous. To elaborate the point here we will mention just two names; Shahabuddin Suharwardi (1155-1191) and Ibn Arabi (1165-1240). The former was greatly influenced by Zoroaster, Plato and Ibn Rushd while the latter is known for a pluralist religious outlook. Mystical works such as *Quwatul Quloob*, *Ahyaul Uloom*, *Awareful Ma'arif* and *Mathnavi Ma'nvi* played a key role in shaping the Muslim mind. Likewise, as the writings of Ibn Taimiyah, Shawkani and Ibn Abdulwahab are considered today as effective tools for creating a salafi mind, or those of Abul Ala Maududi and Syed Qutb taken as a vital source for an Islamist worldview, or the books of *fadhael* vital to shape the naïve religious outlook of the Tablighis, in much the same way, the traditional Muslim mould is a product of various conflicting trends throughout history.

To redeem the Muslim mind from the traditional orthodox mould we need no less than the breaking of the mould itself. No *ijtihad* within the established *fiqhi* framework can bear fruits unless we change the rules of the game. So far orthodoxy has been closely guarding and controlling the *ijtihad* discourse. Within the established norms and as one of the four principles of *fiqh*, the very idea of *ijtihad* would be a non-starter. What is needed is not a mere *ijtihad* in the traditional sense of the term rather an *ijtihad* about the notion of *ijtihad* itself.



# Beyond an Islamic Reformation

From Makkah to Washington DC Islamic Reformation is the buzz word. Though the reform movement is no new innovation in Islam, the rallying cry for reforming Islam from within had never attained such a high pitch. And despite the fact that reformation has an Islamic basis, the external pressure to do so has cast a shadow of doubt on the nature of the reform itself. Then, there are intellectuals in the west, whose advocacy for reform is not to make Islam more compatible with our time but to tame it, thereby creating a version of Islam that may fit into the liberal western framework. The way they did it with Christianity and Judaism. If the followers of Islam feel at home in the citadel of Evangelical Capitalism, it is assumed, the West will lose its most dreaded enemy.

Another variety of reformers includes Muslim scholars who have been trained and educated in the West. This category of Muslim intellectuals look at themselves as a natural extension of great reformers of the past such as Ibn Hazm, Dawood Zahiri, Ibn Taimiyah, Abu Hamid Ghazali, Mohammad bin Abdulwahab, Waliullah al-Dehlawi and the like. And if in the past Muslims had acceded to carry on Islamic reform, they argue, there is no reason that they should object to it in the new situation. However, the mega question still remains unanswered. If our reformers in the past were unable to achieve the required result how can one guarantee that the modern reformers would achieve it today? For the last many centuries Muslim reformers have been calling for a return to the Qur'an and sunnah, for constructing anew the tattered worldview of Islam. Yet no return to the pristine purity of Islam appears in sight. We must focus our attention on the stumbling blocks that have been hindering thus far all our initiatives and turning them into non-starters. The new reformers have a double task; firstly, to pin-point precisely the failures of their predecessors and secondly, to devise a viable methodology and appropriate tools for rediscovering Islam in its true colors, transcending historical Islam and the human interpretations around it. An open debate questioning almost everything under the sky in true Qur'anic paradigm alone holds

promise of rediscovering that great Islamic sensibility which if properly unveiled today could create an unprecedented revolution.

Before we proceed further let us make an honest confession. If our reformers in the past failed to rediscover Islam in its true colors it was mainly because they, despite their desperate willingness to travel back in time and space to the Prophet's Medina, failed to realize that the journey demanded from them a new methodology of enquiry and investigation. They wanted to return to pure Islam employing a *fiqhi* methodology of their choice. Probably, they lacked the courage that was needed to put aside the historical baggage and intellectual garbage that had accumulated during centuries of interpretive activities. The great *fuqaha* and their methodology were considered as no-go 'security zones' that were conveniently to be left out of any open investigation and focus of discussion. To be a Hanafite or a Shafeite was considered crucial for being a Muslim and hence it became simply unthinkable to imagine Islam without its great teachers, the *fuqaha*. Even Iqbal, the poet philosopher of the East, who by virtue of being a distinguished scholar of the Qur'an was no less a *mujtahid*, found it convenient to stick to the Hanafi School of jurisprudence. He once declared that for practical convenience he had adopted the Hanafi *fiqh*. Be they Qur'anic exegetes of repute or other champions of Islamic reform, it was not possible for them to fashion out an Islamic identity without a *fiqhi* tag. The rediscovery of Qur'anic intent and a return to Qur'anic *weltanschauung* remained elusive. And the disturbing question, nonetheless, kept haunting us: why, despite being the Last Ummah assigned to lead humanity till end times, do we find ourselves on the margins of history?

Today, no doubt, Islamic reform stands a better chance. Firstly, it has become clear to us all that the worn out *fiqhi* methodology of the past and outdated tools of inquiry cannot impart to us a true understanding of the changed realities. Secondly, the movement for Islamic revival so vociferously launched in Muslim lands and later exported to the West has miserably failed. Harping on the same string or employing the same methodology can in no way guarantee a future. Thirdly, as the things radically changed around us, the creation of a virtual world on the internet and the implied smallness of the globe have further emphasized that no isolationist strategy would survive in the future. It is no more possible for any religion to work for its salvation in isolation. Fourthly, Muslim intellectuals of our time have come to realize that if today Muslim strategists lack direction and leadership it is mainly because the shape of Islam that has come down to us is more a product of history than the divine revelation. Purging the human or historical elements is a must if we want to achieve the same result that the sublime revelation had achieved during the Prophet's time.

Fifthly, living in the borderless world of the internet has positively influenced our communitarian sensibilities. Being the followers of an international Prophet we aspire, at heart, to become an all-embracing Ummah working for the betterment of entire humanity, yet we find ourselves trapped in the psychological shell of our own making, the cult of the *Ummah Muhammadiya*. In our time Muslim intellectuals and ulema have come to realize that for centuries their segregated living in the supposed *darul-Islam* and their involvement in exclusively communitarian projects have deprived them of their true prophetic moorings, of being a source of mercy and blessings for all. This metamorphosis of an international Ummah into a cult has come under serious investigation today. And the need for rediscovering the Qur'anic intent and reconstruction of a global Muslim outlook has attained urgency. However, amidst great hope and optimism lurks a danger; if a proper methodology is not put forward the opportunity to rediscover Islam in its true colors may slip from our hands once again, leaving humanity directionless for a few more centuries to come.

#### METHODOLOGY FOR REFORM

The task of the Reform Movement is not to reform Islam as such, rather, it has to purge the human, interpretative elements that have overshadowed the true colors of Islam. Islam is a divine message but it is a paradox that it has to be interpreted by the human mind. We are not against the involvement of the human mind as such, on the contrary, we call for making this involvement a continuing process. Great minds of the past have done their job and now is the time for us to work out our own Enlightenment. A new beginning has to be made. And it has to be different from the past if we want to avoid the pitfalls of the past reformers. Here are some suggestions:

- The new reformers must avoid value-loaded terminologies such as 'Reformation' or 'Enlightenment'. There is a real danger that a reform movement itself is swayed by the cultural and historical connotations of these terms. In the west reformation speaks of a process of undoing church tyranny and a head-on collision with rational thinking. A semblance of this situation is not found in Muslim history where both the *Ahbar* of Islam and the ruling elite have continuously faced organized dissent legitimized by the *Shariah*. Those who call for the emergence of a Luther or a Calvin amongst us are in fact unaware of Muslim history and the liberating message of the Qur'an. The same can be said about the term Enlightenment. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have blamed Enlightenment for the Holocaust. Isaiah Berlin levels similar charges of totalitarian

tendencies lurking in the Enlightenment which not only produced the Holocaust but also the communist tyranny, the Gulag. The story does not end here. Owing to the western experiment of Enlightenment some great minds of the West, such as Jefferson, Kant and Hume, came to believe in the supposed superiority of the white race. It was Enlightenment that eventually created the 'stupid white men' and armed them with ideological and scientific justification for colonizing 'the other'. The new reformers of Islam must handle such terminology with the utmost caution.

- No doubt Luther who made a dent on Christian thinking for all time to come rightly argued that scripture should be the final authority, that the mandate of God must stand supreme to the mandate of fallen humans. In the medieval Christian context, it was a revolutionary Idea. There is nothing wrong in learning from the Lutheran experience. Nevertheless, Muslim reformers of today must not lose sight of the fact that the Qur'an is not a mere scripture in the Christian sense of the term and hence cannot be handled just like any other scripture. Here each word is definite and is preserved in the original language, the way it was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad, in verbatim. Reforming Islam from within simply amounts to purging the human interpretative elements in it and not in any situation the intent itself.
- Islamic scholars have usually taken reason as opposite to revelation. They came to believe that rational knowledge and revelatory knowledge do not come from the same source as one is based on observation and the other on intuition. Muslim ulema have always attached more importance to the revelatory knowledge than the observatory Knowledge. Contrary to this attitude, the Qur'an, the main source of the revelatory knowledge among the Muslims, invites people, oft and on, to think and observe. The Qur'an wants us to establish revelatory knowledge on the basis of rational thinking. The Qur'an itself is a rational discourse which calls upon us to be more reflective than dogmatic. Even the most essential doctrines in the creed of Islam such as the oneness of God, the belief in the hereafter and in the agency of Prophethood are not excluded from this discourse. It is a great dichotomy of the human mind that despite its limitation it has been assigned to appreciate the cosmos thereby leading to an enlightened understanding about the creator. Throughout the process it is very much possible to commit mistakes but at the same time learn from them. The great ulema and *fuqaha* of the past were also humans like us. No wonder then if they made mistakes or could not envision our

- modern context in their *fiqhi* formulations. We are not obliged to carry on the burden of others' mistakes; we have enough of our own.
- *Taqleed*, the blind following and Reform cannot go hand in hand, nor can they together pave the way for Enlightenment. There is certainly no harm in learning from the past masters but we should not insist on arriving at the same results. If we feel obliged at the outset to finish with the same result the entire reform activity would be a waste of time and energy, a lifeless imitation of the past. With the utmost purity of mind and heart at our command we are equally capable of engaging with the Revelation as our elders did in the past. We should also bear in mind that revelatory and observatory knowledge are not opposed to each other, they, in fact, complement each other. True knowledge is always reflective, a combination of the two. It is more of a Buddhist *bodhi* than what is generally termed as Enlightenment. Reflective knowledge has no dogmatic fixity nor is it a directionless drift characterized by the western enlightenment whose logical destination is post-modernism.
  - There were some 'security zones', some sensitive questions beyond any investigation and enquiry which the past reformers did not consider it appropriate to go into. For example, knowing well that owing to different *fiqhi* schools of their own making the Ummah is split from within, none dared to challenge the ratio legis of various *fiqhi* schools. Each wanted to achieve broader Islamic unity within the given *fiqhi* framework. Some even made us believe that the four conflicting schools of sunni Islam are a divinely ordained arrangement to provide us with a selection of choice. This is no different from the popular Christian notion that the writings of Paul that now forms part of the canonized text are divinely inspired. The new reformers of Islam have a daunting task ahead. They need to bring the entire heritage literature under intense investigation. Except the last Revelation that has come down to us through Prophet Muhammad no inspired words of any individual or scholarly interpretation of any Imam could form the basis of Islamic canon. Unless we are really able to shake up the very basis of *fiqhi* division and uproot the alien *fiqhi* institutions of *ahbar-al-Islam*, a return to pure Islam will remain elusive.
  - For centuries we Muslims have been living in a psychological ghetto of our own making. As the *Ummah Muslimah* we were entrusted with world leadership but we preferred to recast ourselves as *Ummah Muhammadiyah*, the cult of Muhammad. We were supposed to be a source of mercy and blessings for the entire humanity.

But the emergence of a cultic thinking amongst us has made it very difficult for us to look beyond our noses. The ghetto mindset has transformed the once revolutionary Ummah of Islam from within. Swayed by some popular but fabricated traditions we even came to believe that the Prophet Muhammad, a blessing for the entire mankind and a Warner to all as he is projected in the Qur'an, was only worried about his own people and that the last words he uttered on his death bed were *ummati, ummati* (my people, my people). The Qur'anic basis of a global agenda, the *kalimatun sawa* demands from us that we shed the isolationist mindset. Each and every effort to create a better world deserves our attention. They are very much part of our agenda and deserve our pro-active participation.

- It is high time to question each and every aspect of our heritage literature. There is nothing beyond criticism except the words of God and the proven sunnah of the Prophet. There are no security zones for worn out dogmatic beliefs and no issues beyond the scope of rational investigation. Unless we put the entire historical Islam under intense scrutiny we cannot pin-pointedly say where we went wrong.
- If *ijma* or conventional Islamic practice does not properly fit into a Qur'anic *weltanschauung*, the former must be done away with. *Ijma* or supposed consensus is a false metaphor. No *ijma* has ever taken place on any single issue save it is directly derived from the book of God and the sunnah of his prophet. An *ijma* without a proper rational discourse cannot claim any legitimacy whatsoever. To believe that consensus of the great masters of the past has decided some issues for all time and the issue is now closed for discussion is a product of a slave mindset so vociferously condemned in the Qur'an.
- The words of God and the wise counsels of our ulema are two different things altogether. While the former commands our unfailing respect the latter is a human creation. In other words, the intent of *Shariah* as expounded in books of *fiqh* may not command the same degree of respect as that enshrined in the book of God. We must distinguish between the dictates of God and the edicts of humans.

In a society where an open debate on issues of vital import has been closed for centuries it is not easy to make a new beginning. It amounts to transforming the society from within, journeying from a closed to an open society. This indeed is a daunting task. But there is no other way out.

# In Search of a Prophetic Voice

A Warner to all and the blessing for the entire world as he was, the Prophet Muhammad's message had a universal bearing. He called for the general well being of all mankind, for the emancipation of man from man-made shackles. Islam then appeared to many as a liberating force, a gate wide open on all those seeking solace irrespective of their caste, creed, color or race. The message of Islam coming from the mouth of the Prophet then had an international appeal. It attracted nations far beyond the borders of Arabia. Sohaib of Rome, Bilal of Ethiopia, Salman of Persia saw in this struggle equally the same promise of salvific liberation that brought the local Arab population to side with the Prophet. Such then was the appeal of the prophetic voice.

Today, despite the presence of 1.6 billion followers of Muhammad on this planet, this prophetic voice is not heard of any more. Almost at all international forums of Islam, be it the OIC, the Muslim World League, the Arab League or even the conclaves of prominent Islamic organizations, one only hears much ho-ha about uplifting the Muslim nation or how to arrest the Muslim decline but nothing about how to redeem humankind. Much to our dismay, Islam in our Age has become a communitarian project. This edition of Islam that we Muslims have developed in the course of our historical journey has no attraction for the people of other nations. Instead, they look at it as a rival ideology and a potential threat to their own hegemony. That is the basic rationale behind the American war on terror and lies at the heart of what the establishment intellectuals call the Clash of Civilizations.

Living in a post-era milieu where history has come to us as a meaningless drift, we Muslims have been picked on as a mere scapegoat. The world's media is continuously beaming around the globe a larger than life image of the radicals amongst us who in their desperation, at times, go on ignoring the very basic teachings of Islam. Yet what makes the damage irreparable is the utter absence of the prophetic voice amongst us, that vision of global redemption that once was the hallmark of early Islam. If the moderates or other thinking Muslims limit their efforts to merely uplifting the House of Islam and the radicals work, in their own way, for the global supremacy of their

cult, where will the world find the all-embracing, consoling, life-affirming and healing message of the Last Prophet?

As long as Islam embodied submission to one Lord God, the God of all nations – رب العالمين, it was taken as a universal truth. But when we Muslims turned it into a communitarian project, it became more of an identity than the ideal, losing its appeal for others. The genesis of this transformation goes back to the formative years of the Abbasid Baghdad when our *fuqaha* canonized this universal message as the Empire's ideology. What it constitutes to be a Muslim became the focus of our discussion once it became clear to us that Islam was the ideology for this part of the world alone that we, for our convenience, had come to define as *darul-Islam*. The ulema of the time in their enthusiasm to put Islam at the service of the empire vociferously demanded a commonly agreed statement of the Muslim creed. Leaving the Qur'an aside that spells out what to believe in and what not, the Muslim legists went on formulating the essentials in mainstream Islam. The idea of a created Qur'an had far-reaching political implications, giving the establishment ulema a free-hand in further consolidating their understanding of Islam as the empire's ideology. The move was vehemently opposed by Ahmad bin Hanbal and a host of other scholars, nevertheless, they could not help Islam being stamped as a communitarian project. Verses that left salvific possibilities open for the submitters of other nations were considered abrogated and *fuqaha* took it as their prerogative to judge on sensitive issues that the Qur'an had asked not to divulge and about which we were told that God alone would decide on the Day of Judgment.

Regarding the Qur'an, what does it mean to be the word of God? Did Allah speak to Muhammad in pure Arabic? Or did he merely send down to him the 'intent'? How did it take place – the conversion of the sublime word of God into a human language? Is the Qur'an the Word of God in the same sense as Logos? Such questions had direct bearing on conceiving Islam as the sole heritage and ideology of the new emerging Arabian Empire. That God spoke to Muhammad in an Arabian setting but at the same time Muhammad was entrusted with a global project and his followers were commanded not to acquire any communitarian or local identity, but to submerge in the color of God – صبغة الله – remained no more our concern. Can Islam be conceived minus Arabism? Or can the original intent of the Qur'an be deciphered beyond the linguistic construct? Such questions have bewildered many Muslims through the ages. For example, when Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the East, saw, in the absence of the *Khilafah*, an opportunity to conceive pure Islam without the Arab cultural elements, he was mainly voicing the hope of re-emergence of the universal message of Islam. In our



time, those who find themselves mired in a host of puzzling questions about the linguistic body of the Qur'an which, owing to Deconstruction's fall-out on the linguistic theories, have made it utterly difficult for them to get to the real 'intent' and yet be sure about it. People like Mohammad Arkoun or Nasr Abu Zaid, in their curiosity to discover new meanings in the text have in fact tried to enter the metaphysical zone where being human they got bounced, nay, rather knocked down. In a way, they have brought to the fore the same age old issues that once surrounded the 'createdness' debate. Understanding a timeless document beyond time and space is ideal, but those who live only in time and space cannot simply do that. At most we can re-read the book in the contemporary setting, finding new meanings that our predecessors might have missed. Yet the spatial and the temporal elements of the Prophet's time cannot be altogether peeled out from the text. What scholars of the age of Deconstruction like Arkoun and his ilk are calling for is not simply a study of the text in the light of newly acquired anthropological and linguistic insights, rather in their naivety they are unsuccessfully trying to penetrate into the danger zone, trying to figure out the very process of Revelation. Yet they emerge no wiser from their lengthy discourses despite their deployment of modern linguistic theories and fashionable jargons.

In the Prophet's own time there was no dearth of curious people who wanted to gain some insights into the process of revelation. They even asked the Prophet, the Qur'an tells us, about the mystery of God's agency that brings down divine words to him. On this, the Qur'an does not elaborate much: 'they ask you, O Muhammad about the process of Revelation, say, it is by the decree of my Lord' [17:85]. In another context the Qur'an refers to the three modes of revelation but no further elaboration is made about the process itself. Probably God did not wish to demystify the process or it was beyond human comprehension to appreciate such a complex transformation of God's intent into a humanly comprehensible language. God alone knows the best.

A re-reading of the Qur'an beyond an Arabian setting yet not de-linking it from the spatial and temporal Arabia of the Prophet's time will have a direct bearing on the shape of Islam to come. While it is undesirable to peep into the nature of revelation it is incumbent on all of us to fix our gaze on the bubbling intent of the text and employ all available tools to strike right at the crux of the intent, transcending time and space, making a journey back to the Prophet's *spacia*. This alone can help us rediscover the prophetic voice.

The Qur'an is the word of God, but not the dead words; they keep growing. It is like a prism through which we can see each Age in a different light that can be gleaned

through the past and the future. This is the *ratio legis* of God commanding us to delve deeper into the Qur'an: 'Why don't you make serious reflections on the Qur'an, is it because you don't have a responsive heart?' [47:24]. Those who take the word as a finished product also feel compelled to give the text a meaning in historic setting thus becoming guilty of freezing the text as well as making the text subservient to history, basically a human tool with all its flaws. And those who approach the text as any other text suitable for sociological and anthropological dissection are equally guilty of giving undue importance to as yet to be fully developed tools for any decisive enquiry. Both groups demand, in their own way, sole right to interpretation.

The world around us is not a static place. It is continuously evolving, growing. Ignoring this fact while seizing on the interpretative opportunity is one thing and re-reading the text in our own context is something else. While the former has been instrumental in creating a totalitarian mind and tyrannical regimes in the name of religion, the latter has yet to be experimented with in our time. The temple life in Jerusalem, under the rule of a religious elite, was twice disrupted and remains so to date owing to the dogmatic fixity of the Jewish mind that transformed the universal message of God into a communitarian salvation project. And when the sins of the Church fathers attained unbearable proportions and the theologians claimed sole rights of interpretation not only on the possibility of salvation but even when they started dispensing with it, this totalitarian mindset brought the once powerful to a total ruin. No different was the fate of Ottoman Caliphate that eventually crumbled as it became hard for the bewildered Turks to figure out if they had a prophetic mission at all to carry on. History testifies to the fact that whenever proponents of religion envisioned the universal message as a communitarian project claiming the sole right to salvation for their own flock, they gradually found themselves locked in a closed system where interpretative activities had come to an end. The words of God, in all such situations, appear to them as frozen words that once had spoken to their ancestors, the pious elders. Having lost track of the ever-engaging live words of God, the men of religion find no other alternative but to cling to the pious elders. This uncreative, unhealthy attitude creates a sense of false religiosity and at times ends up in establishing the most tyrannical regimes in the name of religion. God Almighty who sends His prophets to liberate mankind from the shackles of al-Ahbar, the misguided religious elite, has kept something inherent in all such tyrannical systems to engineer their own undoing.

The post-era sensibilities have left us with a big vacuum. The west is experiencing unprecedented crises of its history. Western philosophy is caught in the web of linguistic analysis, the western concept of development is questioned owing to its

devastating ecological effects, and western ideals such as democracy have failed to establish a sane order within the very bastions of western civilization. Today, not only the invincibility of science is being questioned, social norms involving abortion, gay marriages, and sexual ethics before marriage once taken as given have become topics of discussion again. The modern west has lost its glamour and what is in the offing is not yet clear.

The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in interfaith gatherings. Religious people in various traditions find it hard to live in isolation or to deny salvific possibilities to the others. Amidst the murmuring of liberation theology of Latin America, the homeland theology of Taiwan, the Minjung theology of Korea and the Dalit uplift-theology of India, the remnants of that old modern world, we clearly hear the hankering for a truly global theology. This concerted effort to rediscover the eternal message of God, the God of all nations, the *rabbul aalameen* as the Qur'an puts it, may bear early fruit if we Muslims wind up our communitarian Islam project inviting all nations on this planet to sing the praise of Lord God in unison:

Praise be to Lord, the Lord of all nations,  
The Merciful, the Mercy-giving,  
Master of the Day of Judgment.  
O Lord! You we worship and from You we seek support.  
Guide us to the right way,  
The way of those on whom You bestowed your blessings  
And not of those on whom your wrath fell  
And not of those who went astray. [1:1-6]

# There will be a Tomorrow

The world we live in has not arisen overnight. The last fourteen centuries have witnessed periodic shifts in the world capital; from the Prophet's Medina to Damascus, then to Baghdad, Istanbul, Paris, Madrid, Amsterdam, London and eventually in our time it is Washington DC that calls the shots. True, there are other apparently powerful members of the Security Council that sometimes make some noise. The emergence of a Euro-land, the empowerment of the EU and the growth of Asian economies sometime give us the feeling that there are other equally powerful players on the horizon. Then, there is another equally important fact that the major resources of energy so vital to keep the modern world going lie in the world of Islam. And as fifty per cent of the energy resources lie in just five countries, any planning for a future world would simply be inconceivable without them. Yet despite all the given odds it remains a fact that it is Washington DC that controls the world today. In the post 9/11 world the American intervention, rather aggression, around the world and the bowing down of the world community to American dictates have further convinced us that any plan to change the world without proper recognition of American might would simply be unrealistic.

A realistic view of the situation however does not mean that the present world order is irreplaceable. History testifies to the fact that no power on earth has ever been invincible. What is required is to take a realistic account of the situation and formulate a counter strategy accordingly. Wishful thinking or romantic longings can add further woes to our predicament. More than four years have elapsed since the 9/11 incident that jolted the Muslim world more than the United States but unfortunately the Ummah has not been able to put forward a well-thought out work-plan for the future. True, the last four years have not been a cake-walk for the Americans either; the unexpected holdup of the American mission in Iraq; the ceremonial rather non-functional presidency of Karzai in Afghanistan; the rise of Islamist groups to power in Pakistan and Palestine, and above all the growing public unrest against the Bush Administration inside the country have created some real issues. We even hear now of the dollar's future being at stake and there are public murmurings and televised programs calling for the impeachment of Bush. Such furore is a natural reaction to

imperialist onslaughts. But all this should not enhance our delusion that the US is on a retreat and that the fall of Washington DC is now a matter of time.

Had there been no inbuilt mechanism of repair the American Empire might have collapsed under the heavy burden of her sins. But the growing criticism of an administration that it is guilty of misleading the American public on the Iraq issue, and the way many thinking people from the media, academia, politics and human rights groups have come into the open to demand protection of their liberty and freedoms seems to have provided enough room to right the wrongs of the system. It is in fact this strength of the American democracy that holds out the promise of giving America a fresh lease of life and thus enabling Washington DC to function as a world capital for the foreseeable future.

The fall of the Soviet Union had prompted some state-intellectuals in the US to single out Islam as a new threat to the future. This view that Islam was essentially and inherently anti-western was further enhanced by loud proclamations of some jihadi groups and Muslim organizations who after the defeat of the Red Army were swayed by romantic visions. They mistakenly believed that it were they who had inflicted not only a defeat on the Soviets but also engineered the dismantlement of the USSR. And if they could force the Soviets to leave Afghanistan, they argued, why could they not pull down the other super power, the US? In their enthusiasm they conveniently ignored the fact that apart from the human resource that the Muslim nation had provided to the Afghan jihad other equally important factors were responsible for the demise of the Soviet Union. Mention should also be made of the mythical stories that were making the rounds during the Afghan war. It was related that miracles were happening on the battlefield; people even saw angles descending from the sky and the dead bodies of the martyrs were reported to have filled the air with fragrance. Though such stories were helpful in boosting the morale of the fighters, nonetheless, they inculcated in our youth a romantic outlook. Then, there were seemingly Islamic myths that had long made their way into mainstream Muslim thinking. The Mahdi myth which originated in the second century hijra gradually became part of our popular belief system. Despite its foreign origin the *mahdi*/messiah/*mujaddid* myth kept intervening in the emergence of a rational outlook among Muslims. On the very first morning of the fifteenth century hijra when Juhaiman Al-Otaiba along with his followers seized the holy harem in Makkah, he was a victim of this messianic thinking. The oft quoted tradition, which relates that at the beginning of each century God will send a *mujaddid* to set things right, has engineered many a catastrophic situation in our history. At a time when the Red Army was on the retreat and in the neighboring

Iran the Shiite world was witnessing an unprecedented revival under Khomeini who as a *wilayat-al-faqeeh* had claimed to be paving the way for the hidden imam, a romantic view of the future did not seem too much out of place. The jihad in Afghanistan had gathered Islamists from all corners of the world in the bordering districts of Pakistan. After the defeat of the Soviets the Islamists looked at themselves as conquerors, and instead of adopting a rational analysis of the Afghan war, took refuge in the myth of their own making. Although there were enough indications that as believers they were still a fragmented lot and the least deserving of God's unconditional support, they looked upon themselves as a favored nation. After the Taliban took hold of Kabul, romantic thinking attained a high pitch with the use of pompous terminology such as *Amirul-momenin*. It appeared to many that under the leadership of Mullah Omer the modern world was witnessing a replica of the Prophet's Medina where *Ansar* and *Muhajirun* from around the world had gathered for a decisive battle against the global *kufir*. Neither the Muslim intellectuals nor the new *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* who now comprised the cream of Islamists from around the world seriously enquired where the post-Afghan Muslim mind was heading, even though the latter were fully aware that they not only lacked the required planning to topple the global *kufir*, they even lacked the essential insight into the nature of the *kufir* itself. The modern day *Amirul momeneen* and the people gathered around him were inspired by unfounded myths and cultic in their thinking. Without doubt owing to their mythical outlook such people had the potential to act out great disasters but could produce nothing in the form of a new dawn.

A number of years have elapsed since 9/11 but the Ummah has yet to recover from the Bar Kokhba syndrome. The story runs that the Jewish community, confronted with the tyranny of the Roman Empire found in Bar Kokhba an ambitious man and a potential messiah, despite the fact he was not a man of vision nor was he capable of leading a successful revolt against the mighty Romans. Yet it was the romantic longings of the Jews that gathered the entire Jewish community around him. Even a man like Rabbi Akiva known for his political acumen and religiosity endorsed him as a messiah. And as the messiah had arrived the Jewish world extertained an unprecedented amount of hope and optimism. It appeared as if the kingdom of Solomon and David was about to return. But soon the optimism vanished. The Bar Kokhba rebellion was crushed and a general atmosphere of gloom engulfed the Jewish nation for centuries to come. It was not very recently that we witnessed a similar situation in the Muslim world. From Palestine to Peshawar and from Indonesia to Morocco a sea of people were passionately demonstrating in support of bin Laden. For

a moment it appeared that the world of Islam had awakened and the unity in its ranks could now achieve the impossible. Minds inclined to mythical thinking and romantic longings with no inkling of realism can only produce a Bar Kokhba, a Sabbatai Zevi, a Juhaiman al-Otaiba and a bin Laden.

### THERE WILL BE A TOMORROW

The shifting of the world capital from the Prophet's Medina to the modern day Washington DC took almost fourteen centuries. However, for a reversal of the process we need not necessarily wait for an equal amount of time if we can pin-pointedly locate what made seventh century Arabia a world capital. Locating those factors or re-envisioning the pristine world view of Islam is crucial for our future. In our search for the pristine Islamic world view however if we rely too much on historical narrative we may be guilty of making the revelation subservient to history. In the past many of our thinkers committed this mistake. The revelation, in my opinion, has to be understood anew in the temporal and spatial atmosphere of the Prophet's time as it emerges from the contents of the Qur'an. Last but not the least; we need to find out what keeps Washington DC world capital in the twenty-first century despite her blatant violations of justice. In short, without a proper understanding of the modern world we cannot reinstate ourselves yet again in the seat of authority and guidance. To begin with, we need to create a new Muslim mind. In the later centuries of Islam our approach to the divine revelation became dogmatic rather than inquisitive. We have taken our faith as a set of rituals and many of the revelatory truths have become mere cliché due to their oft and unthoughtful repetition. Reshaping the Muslim mind, I believe, will give a new life to many of our lifeless dogmatic clichés. Let me briefly elaborate:

- The Qur'an is a complete book and a definitive text. It is a book for all time. The Qur'an demands from us that we do not give up the habit of thinking and reflection. And it is the bare revelation that should be the focus of our attention. No historical or exegetic material should take hold of our imagination.
- The followers of the last Prophet are upholders of an international mission. Islam as it has come down to us is the converging point of the entire prophetic tradition. Looking at Islam as exclusively the Muhammadan religion (*deen Muhammadi*) undermines the universality of the prophetic mission. It is the religion of Abraham (*Millate Ibraheem*) as the Qur'an puts it and Muhammad is the benefactor of humanity and a Warner to all.

- The Qur'an is in plain Arabic, *Arabie mubeen*. Despite the fact that it was revealed to an Arabian prophet in an Arabian setting, Arabism is not its essential component. Its application in the international arena will transcend all cultural, linguistic and regional barriers. The future Islamic society has to be built on piety and not on those fabricated traditions that institute the Prophet's descendents at the centre stage of a Muslim polity. No specific culture, color or lineage should be taken as the natural color of Islam.
- As deputies of the last Prophet Muslims are entrusted with global leadership until end time. They must reorient themselves to work for the betterment of humanity in general and should not limit themselves to mere communitarian projects. For too long they have been living under the delusion that they are like any other nation. This attitude is in direct contravention to their Qur'anic status and has deprived the modern world of God-fearing Muslim leadership.
- As upholders of the last revelation Muslims have a key role to play in future history. However, a global project of justice cannot be carried out in isolation nor are Muslims enjoined to do so. We need to gather around us all believing nations who can lend their support for a common program, the *kalimatun sawa*. Opening up the doors for other faith communities will make it easier for us to achieve our objectives.
- No single nation can claim a monopoly on salvation. It is a thorny issue on which we are asked to keep our mouths shut. The traditional *fiqhi* rulings that deny salvation outside the present-day Muslim community and believe that the verses in the Qur'an contrary to this view are abrogated cannot be taken as the final word. Such exclusivist opinions have been the real stumbling blocks in activating the other faith communities for Islamic ideals of justice.
- Owing to some worn out cultural norms, today woman stands marginalized in the Muslim society. The code of decent dressing for women as enshrined in the Qur'an needs to be understood beyond any cultural straitjacket. Denying a social role to women is not only against the Qur'an and our own early history, it has virtually kept half of our human potential frozen for a long time. Given the enormity of its global agenda, if the Qur'an enjoins us to seek the cooperation of other faith communities how can we afford to keep the potential of our own women folk under-utilized?
- The Qur'an is a book in detail, *kitabam mufassila*, leaving no room for exegetical manoeuvring. Any reading of the text in a historical context, *asbab-*



*an-nazool*, is not only akin to making the revelation subservient to history, it also obstructs fresh readings of the text for our own specific setting. God has fully conveyed what He wanted to. Does He need the human assistance of the exegetes to make His intent clear and comprehensible? An admonition to all – *bayanullinnas* – as the Qur'an is, it demands from us that we read it as an every day manual. This attitude alone has the potential of generating a revelation-based mass movement.

- Islamic ideals of justice, equality and liberty can only materialize when each human being is able to realize his/her fullest potential and it is recognized that with regard to virtues there is none else between God and man. Scholars of Islam should cease functioning as the clergy and the church-like situation that has stealthily crept into the polity of Islam must be weeded out. The Qur'an projects Prophet Mohammad as the liberator of the human mind from the shackles of *ahbar*, the priesthood, and hence Muslims must shun all kinds of *salf* worship. The new Muslim mind operating within the Qur'anic paradigm, however, has all the possibilities of committing mistakes. But the extraordinary emphasis that the Qur'an places on the use of one's brain leaves no other option for us.

These are some of the essential components of the new Muslim mind which I believe is crucial for a fresh start. I should also confess at the outset that not much is available in the traditional heritage literature that could be put to ready use. Hence there is no alternative to a re-reading of the text. In the past some Muslim thinkers and ulema made concerted efforts to change the traditional mythical mind-set but they ended up in losing their own popularity and acceptability. Their works are now confined to library shelves as *tafarrudat* of great scholars. The new age reformers have to be cautious lest they, instead of initiating a creative reading of the Qur'an, should end up with producing yet another variety of *tafarrudat*. In short, the new movement despite its highly acclaimed intellectual pitch has to come out of the ivory towers of academia.

A full-fledged revelation based intellectual revolution requires engaging some best minds of our time who not only believe in the efficacy of the book of God and the *uswah* of the beloved Prophet but at the same time possess a remarkable insight into the prevailing world order. During the last few years our writings on the issue have attracted a large number of people from across the globe and some three to four

hundred thinkers and writers who equally share our concern have pledged their support to our cause.

Some well-meaning friends have suggested that establishing a university-like institution can be a ground-breaking initiative yet other well-wishers have pointed out that establishing a full-fledged academic institution solely for this project may absorb all our energy in administrative logistics. Before we finally decide for a revelation-based modern university, we should also enquire as to why any such efforts in the past did not bear fruits.

Lately, during the American bombing of Afghanistan when the Taliban's extraordinary courage proved no match for B-52 bombers, it became clear to many of us that unless our *madaris* and seminaries are able to invent something more effective than the B-52 we will be vulnerable to western onslaughts. Living in a world which has largely been shaped by the west and where the West has a marked technological edge over us there can be two possible ways to respond to this challenge: first, we compete with them on the technological front or at least acquire readily available nuclear capabilities; second, we put up our ideological weapons where the military arsenals have failed us. The latter move, though it may appear far-fetched, is closer to the prophetic strategy and has proved its efficacy many a time in the past. Islam, a salvific possibility for all as it happens to be, if presented in the universal Qur'anic metaphor, will certainly find many takers in the top echelons of western society. The sack of Baghdad in 1258 cast such a gloom that it appeared as if the phenomenon called Islam was over once and for all. But soon Islam conquered and then converted the same enemies who held the banner of Islam high for many centuries to come. No wonder then, if today too, unveiling the universal message of Islam yields a similar result.

Given the enormity of the challenge a world class revelation-based university can only be a minuscule of our thinking. We need to think hard and act with courage and confidence.

# The Idea of a New University

Today the Muslim mind faces daunting challenges. Having remained more or less the way it was for around one thousand years, its mode of thought has developed according to a form of dualism. Every effort to ameliorate this state of affairs has been unsuccessful for a number of reasons. An apparently harmless compartmentalization of religion and the mundane world has split the individual and collective lives of Muslims into two parts which even the most intelligent ones among them do not seem bothered about reuniting. Those recognizing the gravity of the situation know that for several centuries Muslims societies have been educating two separate minds – the traditional and the modern. One commands expertise in the knowledge of Shariah (the Islamic law) and the other mind deals with the knowledge of the mundane world. Furthermore, these two minds are set apart in such a way that they do not meddle into each other's affairs. Neither finds the other intolerable. The former has with reference to the knowledge of Shariah monopolized the affairs relating to the life hereafter; the latter considers its role to be to lead the people in the matters of every day life owing to its knowledge of the mundane world. Not only do these two conflicting groups among Muslims inhabit intellectually separate worlds, through their language and communication, culture and society and their specified dress codes they evidence to the fact that the Muslim ummah once called 'united as a strong wall' has now been divided into two (quite distinct) parts. On the one hand, the modern educated section of the Muslims blame conventional scholars for causing the ummah to decline because they have refused to live according to the changing rules of the world. On the other hand, those representing the Shariah complain that the educated Muslims have become directionless and by acceptance of modern educational methods have strayed far from the religious path. For centuries, these two groups have been mutually blaming and criticizing each other and the situation continues today as expressed in the following verse:

وہ اپنی خونہ چھوڑیں گے، ہم اپنی وضع کیوں بدلیں

(‘they won't change their ways, why then must we change ours?’)

How can a nation that is so internally divided, whose intellectual and ideological system has been riven into two with both parties constantly engaged in internecine conflict, be expected to be capable of taking united, decisive and effective action against its real enemies? The history of nations demonstrates that the primary factors pertaining to their growth or decline are nurtured within their inward selves and in particular their minds. Without there being holes within a nation's walls, the enemy without would have no opportunity to penetrate them.

In the past, amongst all the efforts made for the revival of the ummah the least were concerned with avoiding internal rifts and confusion. This is because it may have been considered better to join battle with the rival group and to rally urgent support for this cause, even though it is never easy to conquer one's opponent in such internal strife. Nonetheless, after centuries of intellectual inversion and internal disarray, it remains routine practice and one that even our great reformists and revivalists have considered safer to accept. However, divided into sects, whether according to Shia or Sunni, variant schools of thought or jurisprudence, or the constant discord and disharmony between the Shariah knowledge and the knowledge of the modern world, unless we erase the foundations of these conflicts, we will be incapable of producing a new start. Rather we shall remain prisoners to these never ending illusions and will never embrace the good tidings of a new era.

During the first three centuries after the advent of Islam when apparently Muslims had no knowledge about *Ulum-e-Shariah*, a universal scholarly movement was present within the Muslim world. The increasing influence of the circle of teaching in mosques, story-tellers' interesting modes of expression, the hair-splitting of theologians, the minute analyses of grammaticians, schools of grammar, circles of Hadith researchers, and scientific investigation leading to the establishment of observatories - these were all branches of the Qur'anic worldview. All of these activities complemented rather than excluded one another. Already though in the first few centuries there were signs of future crises especially as seen in the publication and popularity of careless statements made by the storytellers and in existing traditions. In order to curb this potential conflict, the educated established criteria for criticism and purification of traditions. However, at that time no one seemed to think about the dualism with regard to Shariah or religious sciences and other non-Shariah based material sciences. At that time knowledge covered a broad spectrum and wisdom was the 'lost legacy of the believers' (Hadith: *الحكمة ضالة المؤمن*). Appropriating a leadership role Muslims considered it their right to have access to the collective legacy of human civilization and knowledge. This healthy tradition of collective acquisition of the

achievements of earlier civilizations in a very short time impacted on the rest of the world.

The compartmentalization of the Muslim mind which we see today in the form of *Ulum-e-Shariah* and *Ulum-e-Jadidah* (religious and modern knowledge) in principle began in the *madaris* (learning institutions) of the Nizamiya of Baghdad. However, it had already started during the period of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt when for purposes of their political and ideological propaganda an armed force of antagonists was assembled who could employ arguments using religious language to assert Fatimid claims to the caliphate. This propaganda on behalf of a political cause proved to be quite effective and soon Abbasid Baghdad felt obliged to establish institutions for Shariah teachers along the lines of the Nizamiya *madaris*. Not only did the Abbasid candidates for the caliphate initiate a series of misleading *fatawa* (religious decrees) and propaganda against the Fatimids, they also appointed distinguished contemporary scholars to undertake the task of issuing statements exposing the family roots of the Fatimids. They were to leave no stone unturned in demonstrating the falsity of their claims. Al-Ghazali's *Fazaih al-Batiniyyah* is a living example to this type of activity. Clothing political propaganda in religious language created havoc as scholars and knowledgeable persons of high rank with bright minds were appointed to accomplish this volatile and contentious job. The *madaris* of the Shariah scholars and the *khanqahs* of the Sufis both received favors from the rulers. Villages were able to found such combative institutions by means of receiving large *waqf* properties and land endowments. Matters became so grave that the eminent scholar, Al-Ghazali, who played a key part in this conflict and who himself received such favors, could not remain silent about the situation. He objected that ambitious people should resort to obtaining religious positions in the learning institutions of *Ulum-e-Shariah* as a way of securing social status and control of large *waqf* properties. However, neither social recognition nor political favors were given to those that opted for professions such as medical sciences or other areas of scientific investigation, nor could they secure leadership positions in terms of religious lands and endowments whether in Fatimid Egypt or Nizam ul Mulk's Baghdad. Both needed scholars of Shariah who could run an effective campaign of political propaganda employing religious discourse and who could present arguments using the Shariah language on rulers' political rights.

The use of traditions and theological interpretation for political purposes produced far-reaching, destructive consequences. Later when the struggle between the opposing caliphates reached its end, and these caliphates disappeared into the pages of history, even then such contentious arguments for political rights and power to the caliphate

did not disappear. This genre of political propaganda has been safely compiled and preserved in the books of *Ulum-e-Shariah*. Moreover, the institutions of learning of *Ulum-e-Shariah* that had been established out of temporary political expediency had been popularly and permanently certified and authenticated within the Muslim world. Secondly, the mundane sciences or modern knowledge were disrespected because of their non-Arab roots. Such division of knowledge – between the religious and natural sciences - had been introduced by Abu Abdullah al-Katib al-Khwarizmi (d.387 AH) in his book *Mafateeh al-Ulum*, hence it was not a planned terminology, merely a constructed compartmentalization undertaken by a list maker. He could not have known that later on the term *Ulum-e-Shariah* would cause confusion misleading Muslims about one thing among others, that certain parts of Shariah knowledge grant a sanctified status to those who uphold them as they claimed to be the heirs of the knowledge that was introduced by the Holy Prophet. On the other hand, all other knowledge which was initiated by non-Arabs did not bestow similar respect and honor on those who upheld them.

The learning institutions specified for the *Ulum-e-Shariah* that were originally established for temporary political needs soon became a symbol of what was in effect a new religious clergy. This idea became popular that it was to the scholars of Shariah that the right of explaining and interpreting the religion was reserved, they whose religious position was authenticated due to the fact that they were heirs of the Prophet's knowledge. However, these scholars of Shariah had from the beginning followed a mode of thinking reflecting differences in terms of sectarian divisions and schools of thought. They received the patronage of the Nizam of the age as part of an ideological army. The scholars of Al-Azhar were appointed in order to support the Fatimids' right to the caliphate; the institutions of learning of Nizamiya Baghdad, leaders in the Sunni school of thought, had as their main task to support and justify the political right of the Abbasids. As a result of these conflicting and belligerent institutions being declared the headquarters of the *Ulum-e-Shariah*, the Muslim mind accepted internal conflicts and divisions as an established pattern within Islamic scholarship. By then it had become unimaginable that Islam could have a united center of Prophethood that was free from controversial conventions, political argumentation, and theological disagreements. From then till now, Muslim thought has been so caught between the Sunni schools of thought and the Shia schools of thought that today it seems irrelevant to attempt to establish a unified Islamic center. It seems as though if one were to establish such a center, the entire edifice of Islam would be kissing the ground.

The term, *Ulum-e-Shariah* has also caused the birth of another area of confusion in Islam concerning the right to explain and interpret religious scriptures, where this is reserved for a particular section of scholars. As a religion Islam leads in proclaiming freedom of thought and the Holy Qur'an has been presented as savior from the chains of slavery and oppression. It is indeed an irony that a section of Muslim scholars would clandestinely become part of a new clergy and that the learned would be enabled in the issuing of legal decrees out of impartiality. Furthermore, it is ironic that on the basis of holding such a preeminent position they would claim in letter and spirit to be qualified to explain and interpret relations between man and God. Nevertheless, the validity of their decrees are constantly open to challenge owing to the fact that those issued by one scholar may be in conflict with the ones of another scholar and the theological reasoning of one rejects that of another. The Holy Qur'an itself has given a ruling on the falsity of such claims: [4:82].

The position of the learned scholars granted by the *Ulum-e-Shariah* was limited in that it could not encompass the entire life of a man. In their addresses, the Shariah scholars focused almost solely on areas containing commandments numbering between 150 to 500 verses of the Qur'an. The remaining parts were merely recited or practically ignored as these verses were considered to be out of the field of the Shariah scholars. Their control on the Holy Qur'an also caused further damage in that those engaged with experimental and scientific research slowly lost touch with this great book of guidance. Once the leader in freedom of thought, such that a Bedouin woman could launch a public attack on Caliph Omer's understanding of the Qur'an and the ruling caliph had to rethink his stance, after the rise of the Shariah scholars the opportunity for such healthy dialogue was no longer available to the Muslim community. By then it had become the practice to challenge the validity of decrees by issuing counter decrees to existing ones. In other words, scholars engaged in commentary and interpretation of religious matters as if these pertained only to their domestic realm. The masses had no choice but to follow one of these conflicting groups. Common in those days was the quip that the four imams and their followers were all simultaneously correct in their rulings even though they were in apparent conflict. By this process of authentication performed in the *Ulum-e-Shariah* Islam itself underwent a change so radical that the united center of the message of the Holy Prophet was lost. The sacred province of *Ulum-e-Shariah* gave life to temporary political conflicts which eventually crystallized in centers such as Shia, Sunni, etc., and within these there were further divisions among the followers of Prophet Muhammad with regard to *Ulum-e-Shariah* and *Ulum-e-Jadidah*.

Today, one thousand years after the term '*Ulum-e-Shariah*' was devised and the institutions of Shariah scholars gained sacred importance with reference to the heritage of the Prophet's revelation, it is not easy for ordinary Muslims to accept that the current meaning of *Ulum-e-Shariah* and the role of the Shariah scholars in the interpretation of the scriptures was created at crisis-ridden points of our history. They are unaware that any kind of clerical system, whether on the basis of political or racial divisions as was the case with the Fatimids and the Abbasids, or with reference to authoritative explanations and interpretations claimed by the learned of Islam, is contrary to the fundamental teachings and the general conduct prescribed by this open-minded religion. The Book of God is an eternal gift for humanity which each individual has a right to benefit from according to his/her capacity. No one can be flawless in this exercise even though they may hold a high political position or a special kind of knowledge.

The Muslim society is fundamentally nourished by the concept of a direct relationship between man and God. For example Abu Bakr, who took a rigid stance over prisoners after the Battle of Ridda (wars against apostasy) which was not accepted by Omer and other companions of the Holy Prophet, despite all his political power considered it best to avoid implementing his decisions. If Abu Bakr or Omer could have their knowledge of the Holy Qur'an contested and they could reconsider their stances or avoid taking steps, why should decrees issued by ordinary scholars of the age be granted a sacred position? In reality, neither the theologians who created the four distinct schools of Sunni Islam nor the great Shia who authored the books that helped the foundation of Shia Islam, were appointed by God to exercise this right nor had these individuals personally shared the company of the Holy Prophet. There is no rhyme or reason why it would not be possible to conceive of Islam without them. So far, however, all the efforts made towards renewal, revival and reform have intentionally or unintentionally avoided this fact. Unless we reformulate our personality as well as succeed in controlling the intellectual and ideological disarray prevailing amidst us, which divides us into ever further groupings, any effort toward a new beginning will simply be absorbed in the old meaningless circle of thoughts. For a new beginning, at the very least, the construction of a new self is required that derives its energy from Divine inspiration rather than history, which would not only be aware of the collective heritage of knowledge, but should be completely purified from the erroneous misconception that by seeking knowledge in fields other than Shariah, it had opted for a lower branch of knowledge. Its understanding of the message of the Prophet Muhammad must not be conditioned by the compartmentalization attributed



to four imams or twelve imams. Instead, such a self must have access to the united and authentic center of the religion that transcends historical Islam. In other words, in order to re-establish the ummah in its seat of leadership of the world, it is essential that we find the necessary courage to do away with these internal conflicts and divisions and the confusion that has penetrated us during various phases of the history and which we have unfortunately and mistakenly considered as the actual center of the religion of Islam.

Who would be able to deny the truth of this notion that the fundamental factor behind our political decline and ideological confusion and conflict is the supply of religious recognition to this political conflict which later on took the form of the internal sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims? Who could fail to see the painful consequences of the way this conflict divided us and how our history is replete with the bloodshed from these mutual attacks? Previously, the Fatimid Caliphate or Buyid dynasty demanded that a sectarian school of thought must be nurtured. On the other hand, the construction of Sunni Islam was a political necessity of the Abbasid Caliphate without which the pulpits of mosques could not echo with the sound of اللهم اغفر للعباس و ولده مغفرة ظاهرة و باطنة لا تغادر ذنبا. Now that this political conflict and its builders have become things of the past, there is no reason why their intellectual remnants should continue to hinder our journey as an ummah. Similarly, today in the capacity of an ummah we find ourselves entrapped by confusing notions due to which we have been unable to lay our hands on investigatory knowledge. Unless we do away with such confusing notions with each step we take we will meet with failure. The best minds in our midst will continue to indulge in partial, superficial and baseless argumentation in the garb of *Ulum-e-Shariah*. Their sacred presence will feed our confusion regarding knowledge and split minds and Muslim personalities continue to grow amidst us. As long as we continue to validate this dualism of religion and the world, we fail to engage with secondary knowledge because it neither grants salvation in the life hereafter nor the sacred privilege of being called the heirs of the knowledge of the Prophet. In the new beginning, not only must we undo our sectarian history, we must accomplish the greater task of revealing how this fundamental confusion has deprived us of the light of true knowledge and caused all our efforts in research and analysis to fail.

Thus far, we have upheld the notion that this division of knowledge into Shariah and non-Shariah is non-Qur'anic and misleading. In the past, our authenticated scholars too have been silently protesting this situation. Al-Ghazali did not count theology among *Ulum-e-Shariah* as it was more related to the matters of the worldly

life. The time has come that this silent protest should take the form of bold scholarly evaluation and it should be openly announced without any fear of consequences that the division of knowledge into two parts of Shariah and non-Shariah is itself contrary to the Shariah. Expertise on *nikah* (marriage), *talaq* (divorce) and the historical context of prophetic narrations is as much part of Islamic knowledge as the keen observation of the human body and the mysteries of the universe. In our institutions of religious learning the reason why the demand for including contemporary sciences in the curriculum has been unsuccessful in so far as generating positive results is concerned is that we have been unable to inform everyone about the truth behind these conflicts and confusions that emerged during the crisis of Abbasid Baghdad. On the other hand, the reason why in contemporary institutions of learning, a patch-work of Islamic sciences has failed to produce beneficial effects is because of the same confused thinking with regard to *Ulum-e-Shariah*. The trouble is that the knowledge that we have come to consider as Shariah knowledge is not only contrary to the Qur'anic concept of knowledge, it has also been produced from the beginning by a flawed methodology. If you look carefully, this principle of four schools pertaining to interpretation and hermeneutics flew in the face of the Holy Qur'an and belonged instead to the worlds of tradition and historical relics. *Ijma'* (consensus of the Muslim community) and *qiyas* (extensive knowledge of individual scholars) were added, and together these three sources of knowledge were given the *cachet* of reliability with respect to interpretation, and placed on an equal footing with the eternal source of knowledge – the Holy Qur'an itself. Such a methodology could only generate disagreements. In reality, these imprecise and finite sources had undermined the guiding role of the Holy Qur'an; the eternal, uncontested and final document sometimes being subordinated to history, to *ijma'* and *qiyas*. Unless this non-scientific methodology is challenged and the book of God is established as the unconditional and final document of guidance, any thoughts of a new beginning will degenerate into worthless repetition of the same outdated ideas.

Enough is enough. The notion that all the theologian-imams are justified in their interpretations must no longer be accepted. We must find the courage to evaluate them on their own merit. The political requirements of the Abbasid era demanded a peaceful Islamic amalgam agreeable to all parties. Political exigencies required Sunni Islam to present the four imams as reliable sources of belief to the general public. In the Abbasid *khutbah* (sermon) alongside praise of the Abbasid lineage eulogies of Imam Ali and the Panjtan were also included. The provisional expedencies of politicians became the history that set religious beliefs. Yet they did not bring the discord within

the ummah to an end. Instead, as we moved forward our nation continued to be divided into sectarian and theological groupings. Today for a new beginning not only do we have to reject the division of knowledge into Shariah and non-Shariah boxes, it is essential also to remove intellectual confusion by boldly challenging the *Usul e Din* and *Usul e Fiqah* in the light of the Holy Qur'an. Only then will it be possible for us to guard ourselves against the errors of their scientific methodology and the literature they produced over the centuries. Without the reconstruction of a Qur'anic code of life and returning to its original philosophy, the inclusion of secular sciences in religious schools will be a worthless burden that will neither bring an end to the split Muslim consciousness nor would the dream of the construction of a revolutionary Muslim mind be fulfilled.

The situation in contemporary institutions of learning is no better. The secular institutions also present a distorted example of westernization, where more emphasis is laid on importing ideas rather than creating them ourselves. The aimed for standard of preeminence in the secular educational institutions is to become synchronized with their western counterparts. Since the beginning, they have been suffering from a catch-up syndrome which at least shows one thing: that instead of deepening their understanding of the Qur'anic message of reflection, reviving dormant energies by drinking from its pure waters of knowledge, and hence letting the streams of knowledge flow amidst them, these outposts of modern western education suffice with benefiting from the distant light that enters their quarters.

One of the reasons for this attitude is that they may either be unaware of or lack access to the centuries old scholarly and scientific tradition from their glorious past which has also played a role in the foundation of modern western civilization and is partly responsible for the way in which the west thrives today in the fields of technological advancement and scientific discoveries. Another reason may be that the synthesis of Islamic studies within contemporary educational institutions in the Muslim world has so far been unsuccessful in producing any viable results. Perhaps for this reason since the establishment of Aligarh University and other Islamic universities established by OIC, Islamic studies has played a limited role, consigned to the faculty of *Diniyat*, *Islamiyat* or inspirational knowledge. Since Islamic studies have been wrongly limited to the knowledge of Shariah, the potentially revolutionizing and reviving method of interpretating religion other than through Islamic history and current theological methodologies, have either not been recognized or not thought through.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who was considered to be the pioneer of the advocacy of the contemporary education, was aware that the current understanding of religion and the popular methodology of the study of Islam was contrary to the message entrusted to the Holy Prophet in the Holy Qur'an. In relation to his cultural heritage Sir Sayyid adopted a healthy method of research, analysis, critique and evaluation which raised hopes that a new dialectical knowledge based on investigation and observation might be created from scratch. However, owing to his commitment to an approach rather imitative of the west, he was unsuccessful in laying the foundation of a new scholarly tradition. He was astounded to see the ancient buildings of Cambridge and Oxford universities based on Islamic architecture and declared them exemplary models of educational institutions. However, being under the influence of the western propaganda, he ignored the fact that it was the Islamic tradition that had played a key role in laying the foundation of these universities as well as in their own growth and development. Had Muslims not transferred '*Ulum-e-Arabiya*', the term used for natural science during the Middle Ages, to Europe; and had the European scholars of the period not been educated and trained in the Muslim educational institutions of Sicily and Andalusia; and had the Arabic books on science and technology published between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries not been continuously translated into Latin and other western languages; then the astonishing scientific civilization of the west that had so impressed Sir Sayyid would not have come into being. Like other scholars of his time, unfortunately Sir Sayyid too had believed in the racial, political and cultural supremacy of white westerners. As a result, instead of introducing a new chapter in its cultural tradition, Aligarh University accepted the scholarly tradition of the west in its entirety without any research and analysis. A few honest Englishmen were sincerely appointed to introduce the new Muslim generation to their civilization. However, one thing was lost during this struggle i.e. it only coalesced in minds and hearts that could convert Aligarh into an amalgamated version of Oxford and Cambridge universities. In other words, any tradition that suffers from a catch-up syndrome each moment of its life seldom produces intuitive hearts and innovative minds. Soon investigation of the old scholarly tradition and stormy discussions on *ijtihad* and reform were reduced to absurd talks in the departments of conventional knowledge. The great and glorious scholarly methodology of understanding, wisdom, explanation and interpretation that Sir Sayyid had adopted became a useless exercise in a counterfeit environment found in Aligarh. Moreover, in practice, Aligarh has been constantly struggling against liberal mindedness and the effort in reflection and wisdom of its founding father. There is no doubt that Aligarh has performed great service to society. However, this owed to the

fact that its founding father had to pay a great price in the form of foregoing his original aims.

Whether it is Abduh's Al-Azhar University or Shibli's Nadwah or other efforts of this kind for renewing the syllabi, there is no doubt that as compared to Sir Sayyid the above personalities produced a precariously weak tradition. However, this was a devalued tradition primarily nourished by the discussions of ancient Greeks rather than divine inspiration. How could any effort, in terms of ancient or modern, guarantee a new beginning in the Muslim world? Neither Al-Azhar nor Nadwah were different from their rival Deoband especially in their interpretive methodology. Later when Abul Ala Maududi fiercely criticized Aligarh and presented a design for a new education system, he too got engaged in the compilation of current Shariah knowledge. Subsequently, he paid no attention to investigatory knowledge. Perhaps this was because in spite of being strong advocates of reform and revival, these eminent scholars had considered the legacy of Islamic knowledge as the origin of Islam itself. Despite all their claims concerning benefiting directly from the Holy Qur'an, they considered holding on to the four imams as an important part of their faith. In spite of strong criticism of the weaknesses of their dialectical methodology, they considered it inconceivable to introduce a new scientific methodology as it could have shaken the historical base of the heirs of Islam i.e. Sunni Hanefi, or Shafei, or Hanbali. Their life-long study of Islam could not liberate them from these rationally constructed human points of reference. Hence it was highly unlikely that they could formulate a united and a pure scholarly tradition of Islam rising above the four imams and the sectarian division of Sunni and Shia; a tradition ornamented by a passionate study of the universal book at the hands of the adherents.

A new beginning demands an entirely novel revolutionary line of action. Unless old frameworks of reflection and observation are broken down, new patterns cannot be formed. In other words, given that today our scientific confusion and methodological aberrations have existed for about one thousand years, at least one condition for any such new line of action is to prepare a new mind which cannot be done by studying ancient books alone. Instead of using outdated methods of explanation and interpretation, this new mind would be capable of using the Holy Qur'an as a symbol of guidance which would fill the individual and collective lives of Muslims with the light of divine revelation. This new mind would focus both on verses of commandment as well as verses of exploration. In other words, a foundation will be laid for using the entire Book of Guidance as a single book. Hence, the prevailing situation of الَّذِينَ جَعَلُوا الْكُفْرَانَ عِزِينَ [15:91] i.e. severing their scriptures into fragments; accepting part of it –

would be brought to an end. First and foremost, we would have to accept the reality that as the followers of the final Prophet we have been entrusted with the leadership of the world till the end times. In the absence of the Prophet, the Holy Qur'an remains as the *hujjatu ba'da al-rusul* which is an established code of life for all the nations of the world. If this code of life is excluded from the lives of individuals on the basis of intellectual or ideological confusion or compromised explanation and interpretation, whether restrictions on the meanings of the Holy Qur'an were imposed on the basis of artifacts or dialectical and false theological argumentations, this is not only harmful to Muslims as an ummah, it will amount to humanity losing its direction. For the past few centuries, since Muslims lost their role as world leaders, they have been stricken again and again by devastating consequences.

Secondly, we should not hesitate to admit the fact that the foreign dialectical methodology that used to echo in the initial centuries of Islam under the influence of the Greek wisdom as finally revived within Wasil's four principles was enforced as the current, certified scientific methodology. All other efforts of getting out of the dialectical method of argumentation and critique became an extension of this very process. As a result, the possibility of formulating an open method of theology and interpretation slowly became scant. In the coming years, various Muslim political groups used this methodology for their sectarian interests. Those opposed to this philosophy also felt the need to provide dialectical qualification of their own in order to compete with their opponents. Hence the influence of a foreign methodology became a fixed feature of the task of explaining and interpreting the religion of Islam. For the creation of a new mind, it is essential not only that it be conscious of the dangers of this prevailing scientific methodology, it should also have the courage to establish a new scientific methodology in the light of the Book of Guidance and wisdom.

Thirdly, in its resistance to the Holy Qur'an, the Greek wisdom had attempted to hinder the path of investigative movement apart from the method of interpretation and insight. During the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, several centuries were lost in concentrating on the process of translation of the speculative books written by Greek scholars as well as their reform and correction. Muslims had rejected the confused speculative knowledge of the Greeks on the basis of their own observation and experimentation and replaced it with a new system of sciences. However, up to today that speculative knowledge has not been eliminated from the dialectical methodology of theology and interpretation. It is no easy task to evaluate and assess the validity of centuries old interpretive tradition in order to prepare a new mind. However, without completing this process every new beginning would in fact be reduced to the outdated

and futile processes of the past. Fourth, it would be essential for the preparation of a new mind that in the process of benefiting from the Book of Guidance it uses history and artifacts but without declaring them as the key to the understanding of the gist of meanings. The divine revelation does not deserve to be subjected to history and artifacts. Using human imagination as the method of understanding a final document like the Holy Qur'an, which word for word is recognized to be beyond doubt or need of change, is equal to suspending it. Neither can history be declared the key to the essence nor is history worthy of trust as religion and belief are. This false move was manifested in the case of declaring various schools of thought such as Shia and Sunni, Hanafi, Shafei, Zaidi and Ja'fari certified religious centers. A new Muslim mind that has the responsibility of fulfilling the aim of the Holy Prophet in our times could be neither Shia nor Sunni, nor can it be equipped according to accepted Hanafi and Shafei strictures that are not supported by the Holy Qur'an.

Fifth, a further prerequisite for a new beginning is to admit the fact that the required results of the scientific and investigative movement incited by the Holy Qur'an are yet to be delivered. Owing to the penetration of foreign scientific methodology and as a result the popularity of mythical rather than investigatory modes of thinking, our progress as a united ummah has been obstructed. The advocates of conquests and physical exploration themselves demolished the largest observatory of the world established in Istanbul in 1580. This is the epoch during which Tycho Brahe struggled to establish the first observatory in Europe. Later, after about a quarter of a century, the establishment in 1675 of a British observatory on Greenwich hill in England symbolically announced the change in world leaders. Within no time, Greenwich meantime became standard time for the entire world. For a new Muslim mind, it would be essential to bid farewell to mythical ways of thinking and once again gain control over time and history. This would be possible only once the realization dawns that without the appointed ummah the journey of history loses its direction and purpose.

For the preparation of a new mind and the construction of a complete Muslim selfhood, the establishment of a new kind of institution of learning is needed, where the determination to do everything possible prevails. For this a form of revolutionary thinking is required that is able to learn from the mistakes of the past, which tests the present on the scales of research and analysis, and is capable as well as of previewing the future by the light of inner wisdom. We will have to take the utmost care to benefit and learn from the existing models of institutions of learning all over the world on the basis of which the current civilization thrives today, whether these are situated in the

east or in the west. If knowledge in the east suffers from dualism, in the west, especially after the establishment of military industrial complexes, the gaps between literature and philosophy and science and technology have been constantly widening. A student of philosophy and literature has become a stranger and a loner in the technological civilization of the west. In other words, western educational institutions are safe from the scientific dualism of knowledge as well as internal divisions. However, the truth is that this super-specialization has divided the spirit of search through concentration on monomodal thinking, resulting in acceptance of a general lack of awareness amongst us. In this situation, importing eminent institutions of learning from the west in their current forms is no solution to our problems. Such institutions do not have the sole purpose of imparting knowledge nor is there any such thing as 'singularized' knowledge. Educational institutions construct a cultural reality that conforms to the code of life that has kept their respective historical, religious and cultural traditions alive.

It is an appallingly and misleading notion that by transferring the best institutions of learning of the west to the Muslim world or establishing their campuses in our societies, this will rid us of our intellectual poverty within a blink of an eye. Despite all their scientific prowess and high research standards, western educational institutions are in reality based on and nourished by the western code of life. These can hardly deliver a selfless universal mode of thinking let alone create a new Muslim mind. Scholars of the west with tendencies toward deep reflection have for some time been narrating the stories of the decline of these institutions and their destruction at the hands of ruthless capitalists. In order to realize the seriousness of this situation, not only is it essential to point out the evils that have plagued higher institutions of learning in the modern era, we must also try our best to refrain from incorporating these evils into our own institutions.

There is no doubt that the history of the establishment and advancement of universities in the west owes a great deal to the Muslim east. During the past few years, a novel form of historical writing has provided ample evidence that Palermo, Bologna, Paris and Oxford universities were established as a result of the impact of the Arab Islamic system of education. For about five to six centuries the Latin and local translations of *Ulum-e-Arabiyya (Studia Arabum)* or investigatory knowledge were used as the syllabi in these institutions of learning, so much so that until 1619 in Oxford, knowledge of Arabic language was thought necessary for teachers of geometry and astronomy. It is common knowledge that Ibn Sina's *Al Qanoon fil Tib* was routinely used in western institutions of learning. Nor is it a secret that the term 'college' is a



westernized version of the Arabic term '*Al-Kulliyah*'. Furthermore, not only were the hierarchical scales of bachelors, masters, and doctorate used in the universities today borrowed from the Muslim world, the honorary dress such as hoods and gowns used during the convocation ceremonies also bear witness to their Muslim roots. In this regard, the western institutions of learning have been built by extension from Muslim schools of learning. Hence, there is no reason why we should shy away from this great scholarly tradition that originated in the shade of Islam. Had European educational institutions not gone through an intellectual revolution, and had they not incorporated suspicion and propaganda in the guise of knowledge and later, due to the political circumstances, especially after the establishment of the American Military Industrial Complex, had the capitalists not used it for their reprehensible goals, we would not need to resist the idea of importing this scholarly tradition in its advanced form. However, alas! Not only did the colonial mind of the west construct new myths during the nineteenth century in order to justify its supremacy, and invested them with the status of authentic history, they also invented knowledge that was fundamentally aimed at proving the racial, historical and psychological supremacy of the white-raced people.

Whether in historiographical or geographical writing, sociological sciences or the hypothetical experiments underlying 'scientific' racism, western intellectualism of this period compromised many branches of knowledge prompted by prejudices and bias. During the centuries of colonialism, the Islamic east did not challenge these quasi-scientific ideas due to the fact that it was engaged in a struggle for its own survival. Without a worthy opponent the west became slave to its own prejudices and the institutions of research and inquiry established for western sciences became 'prisons of learning' for future generations. For instance, Freud's psychoanalysis was dominant until the end of the twentieth century but the development of new technologies such as the brain mapping of neuroscience has led to the discovery of entirely different information about the human brain according to which moods of happiness and depression are said to be linked to change in the level of serotonin. Anthropology, developed in the colonial period, declared people of the east to be non-rational and either passionate or passive, in contradistinction to white, western man whose attitude was rational and whose brain was proportionately bigger than the brain of other non-white peoples. These ideas may now have lost credibility but their influence can still be found today. Similarly, one might also bring into the picture the misleading historical insights of scholars such as Karl Marx and Max Weber, who were quite different from each other but whose intellectual interventions have played important roles in furnishing the western mind in relation to the east. The world map prepared by

Mercator which was once used in every school throughout the world, glorified the west and undermined the significance of the east and the south. Under the influence of misconceived western greatness, this map distorted the size of the limited area of Europe and projected it as a continent merely on the basis of propaganda. Contrastingly, the vast area comprising India-Pakistan was given the status of a sub-continent. Furthermore, Greenland, despite covering an area one-fourth of China, was shown as double its size; and despite possessing an area one-third its size, Scandinavia was presented as equal in size to India. Efforts to reform this misleading world-map prepared in the west were rejected on the grounds that a cartography based on actual scales would appear quite unattractive. To us it seems less a map of the world than someone's ugly, wet underwear hanging on the line. From this one but highly symbolic example we can imagine how helpful modern institutions of learning in the west might be in creating freedom of thought and unrestricted and objective analysis.

These are but a few examples of distortion and unreality until recently taught as truth in the intellectual prison cells that are today known as universities. In reality, the situation is much graver. The question is how could a liberal tradition of knowledge and research be established whereby the heart and mind are restricted by untruths constructed out of suspicion and myth? The objections and complaints that we periodically hear coming out of these institutions are actually raised by a few blessed, rebellious and awakened minds that against all obstacles have continued to contemplate, critique and evaluate the distorted status quo. The truth is that the western institutions of higher learning are increasingly becoming atrophied. Today they no longer serve as lighthouses that once guided humanity; it would be better to call them service industries operating as branches of trading companies. Currently, these institutions function as human resources sections according to the requirements of companies such as Disney, Intel, Microsoft, etc., and processes relating to research and discovery have also become subordinate to the interests of rich capitalists. In effect, the number of research projects undertaken in western universities which are constantly on the rise in response to the companies' demands and patronage, show these universities to have become subsidiaries to the purposes and goals of ruthless capitalists.

It is essential to minutely and carefully evaluate the knowledge that was created over the past two hundred and fifty years in order that universities might fulfil their original objectives of imparting quality education. The tradition of liberal inquiry and deliberation must be re-instated, and to achieve this they must be liberated from western superstitions of the nineteenth century. In that era the final actions were taken

in the long process whereby Muslim pre-eminence was dissolved and Muslims were involuntarily discharged from their duty of leading the world. The west, which had for centuries simultaneously been their rival and their follower, took the opportunity to rewrite our history by taking advantage of our political decadence. It cleverly deprived us of the history which had enshrined our original prominence and which also granted us an unshakable confidence in the capacity of the ummah of the last Prophet. Industries of knowledge were established for justifying European colonial objectives as well as the global plundering undertaken by white-race nations. Today, after about two and a half centuries of this process, the west finds itself trapped in the intellectual prisons that it built for itself during its period of colonial sway. The voices of protest that from time to time we hear raised within them in the effort to change the situation have not proven very effective. In this decisive and sensitive moment in history the people of the east, the historical and natural trustees whose responsibility it was to guide and lead the nations of the world till the end of time, must arise and purify their scholarly tradition.

Remember! An intellectual paradigm that has generated controversies does not have the power to resolve them too. Colonialist power and a ruthless capitalism have employed science and technology for their own reprehensible objectives to the extent that eventually western frameworks of inquiry and reflection have been dispersed and destroyed. The abominable trap of capitalism holds the entire world prisoner. Owing to the tax system, individual freedom has been wrested away; environmental pollution and deterioration in food products pose challenges in relation to provisions. It would amount to extreme naïveté to expect that institutions of learning might transform their objectives to help solve these problems. Should they try, the solutions they present would only increase our problems. Each one would trigger a new matter of contention, because the existing institutions are deprived of the ability to think outside their existing paradigms. Generally speaking religious institutions or madrasas are referred to as houses of ignorance. However, we seldom pay attention to the rigidity of the learning taking place in modern institutions and the environmental pollution, economic crises and political coercion triggered by them. Where the traditional madrasas are bent on imitating the methodologies of the Greeks or their forefathers to gain knowledge, modern universities in the east continue to commit the error of perceiving each trend of the west as the voice of 'divine revelation'. Whereas the former have completely disconnected from the modern world like a paralyzed limb, the latter continue to devote their services to the corporate world. In order to initiate a new beginning, it is essential to rise above prejudices about old and new, east and west, so that we can establish an

educational institution on the basis of the abrogation of current intellectual paradigms and where political, psychological, geographical, racial and national differences may not hinder the new way forward.

Just think! Over a short period of two to two hundred and fifty years since the effective expulsion of Muslims from their world-leading position and less than a century after the conclusion of the symbolic Ottoman caliphate, Muslims have lived through a variety of crises. Since European nations have had the opportunities of playing efficacious roles on the central stage of world leadership, instances of cruelty and oppression have only increased in multiple corners of the globe. For instance, the reality behind the romantic stories about Columbus' discovery of America was nothing other than that his successors the conquistadores (conquerors) murdered seventy million people out of the local population of eighty million in search of resources during a short period of fifty years. It is estimated that in the sixteenth century, the population of Mexico comprised twenty-five million inhabitants who by the end of the century had been reduced to one million only. In these new colonies, black African inhabitants were forced into slavery for labor tasks on the plantations. In various parts of the world, in the name of introducing a new civilization the white European nations plundered at the expense of the indigenous populations, as well as destroying old societies and civilizations on a large scale - an organized genocide unique to human history. The trouble was that no part of the civilized world could escape such tyrannies. The resources and prosperity that had been created for a comfortable life and shared means of survival, enabled by a common center of civilization established between Java, Sumatra and the port city of Tangier, from the eastern ends of the Indian Ocean to the westernmost side of the Mediterranean Sea and including some parts of Europe - colonial autocracies destroyed them all. To obtain fertile fields and green and fresh areas, humans made prey of humans in such an organized fashion that a few racial communities were eliminated altogether. It might justifiably be expected that in the west people of conscience would initiate a mass rebellion against such destruction and ruination of civilization on a grand scale; however, the trouble was that those that had resorted to war and bloodshed as a continuous trade had also cleverly and effectively transformed the thinking patterns in educational and research institutions. Furthermore, as we have briefly mentioned previously, the basic obligation of western universities was to construct this western narrative and to sing eulogies about its sanctity according to which western nations were declared natural heirs to world leadership. This transformation of thought patterns in western universities not only became the cause of the destruction of these lighthouses that could have brought western nations back on

track in their moments of crisis. Rather, with the absence of Muslims from the global scene, it also became the catalyst for the rise of a new dark age.

For purposes of establishing a new beginning it is essential that we become completely aware of the fact that a university not only has objectives relating to teaching and learning or research and discovery, but also for creating an environment in which conditions for equal rights and welfare are available to all peoples and nations of the world. A university is a milestone that constantly informs us of the directions that history has taken in the past and might take in future. It is not necessary that universities that follow the Qur'anic worldview should function in Muslim societies alone, just as in the same way it has been possible today that universities with western and capitalistic worldviews are functioning in Muslim societies without anyone questioning their ideological foreignness. In the Europe of the Middle Ages where the system of learning and teaching and the Qur'anic tradition of reflection on the book of the universe played a key role in the establishment and strengthening of European universities, no one was able to appreciate that this tradition of research and discovery had originally been an extension of the scholarly culture of Muslims rooted in the book of Divine revelation, the Holy Qur'an. Even today, those who would plan to establish a new university would have to make sure that its foundation is based on the code of life reflecting the Qur'anic invitation to discovery and exploration. Any learning institution devoid of a universal, inspirational and invigorative code of life would be nothing more than a knowledge industry without spirit, even though its astonishing facilities and abundant resources may have projected it as a living institution.

The majority of educational institutions in the Middle East were established under the naïve and illusory expectation that knowledge would undergo quick advancement and once again the Muslim world would regain its earlier dominant position in knowledge. Today they are suffering from feelings of disaffection precisely owing to the fact that along with the essential features of a university the western mind and western concept of life were also imported whether intentionally or inadvertently. Whether it is due to their keen interest in leadership or their passion for reformation, the countries that have set up these universities have tended to ignore an important point that each individual is basically also a historical and cultural entity. With a transformation of worldview, our dreams and aims also undergo a transformation. The second nature of a civilized man is formed in the civilization where he/she is brought up. In other words, an individual's dreams are closely connected with educational institutions in the society he/she lives in. There is no problem if the dream of an American scholar brought up within the callous American civilization with its oppressive capitalist system should be

different from that of a Muslim scholar. We must simply understand that a scholarly tradition cannot be purchased, nor can hired advisors prepare a nation for a momentous task such as world leadership. In fact, one fears that importing western educational institutions in their existing forms may bring unwanted changes in our own dreams.

If the worldview guarantees safety and trust and if the purpose of life is clear, building a new world of research and discovery does not take an interminably long time. Despite our present intellectual and ideological bewilderment our institutions of learning have in the past played an effective role in the journey of human civilization owing to the fact that we were sufficiently aware of the predetermining values underpinning our ideological and religious objectives. Even today, if our dreams are returned to us, our schools of learning may become sanctuaries where we can nurture new avenues for research. Hence we would not need the education system in its current form, dividing knowledge into compartments, and filling the minds of students with western values and the gist of their scholarly character. Until we realize that the current university system with its compartmentalization of knowledge has only succeeded in forming tunnel-visioned scholars fixated on the current mechanical system of admission and examination, the possibility of bringing through extraordinary, giant thinkers will remain scanty to say the least. The entire system is geared to produce mediocre graduates who perform as nothing more than mechanical instruments in the hands of the capitalistic system. This being the state of affairs in university education, how can there be room for the kind of people who could both unravel the deficiencies of the system and take practical steps to eradicate them? In the new institutions of learning we are proposing, it is essential that an educational system be created in which there are ample opportunities for the emergence of learners with keen intellects, broad interests, and a restless passion for research.

Safeguarding of the worldview does not require the new university to preach canonical beliefs as it happens in institutions that expect their teachers and students to promote and strengthen their particular sectarian patterns of thought as well as serve sectarian interests. For example, the founders of the Catholic university expect a certain moralizing stance from staff as part of their obligation. Instead, preservation of the worldview means to build a healthy environment where students would independently achieve their goals. It is the task for the individual to select a role for herself/himself as the trustee of the universe created by God. They must have the liberty to build, if necessary from scratch, the purposes and goals of their own Qur'anic movement of discovery. In other words, the task of evaluation of interpretations must be a continuous

process. This is the method of safeguarding the worldview and constantly ornamenting life with new pinnacles to climb.

As long as knowledge had not been purloined by institutions operating according to the method of mechanical learning, the individual was able to find and develop his/her own personality as a scholar moving within the ambit of mosques to observatories, from the book to the assemblies of theologians and narrators of the Hadith and *Qisas* (Lex Talionis). Doctors, writers, theologians, scientists, and astronomers all would have had a clear idea of the fundamental meanings of the Holy Qur'an and the purposes and goals of society. The signs of the universe would have been studied keeping in view the light shed by the various fields of knowledge. In that environment, acquisition of knowledge would become the wellspring of a contented heart. The general atmosphere of '... Of all His servants, only such as are endowed with (innate) knowledge stand (truly) in awe of God: (for they alone comprehend that)' [35:28] was created by the unity of various branches of knowledge. The argument that earlier times belonged to exceptionally intelligent minds when from Greece to the Muslim world of the sixteenth century one person combined various roles of a doctor, philosopher, theologian, chemist, time-watcher for prayers (*mo'wqqeet*), and astronomer, amounts to mockery of humans of the current age. According to the terminology devised by Kant, such a condition would be equal to suffering from 'self-imposed immaturity' and perhaps it is so that individuals continue to perform their role as instruments of the capitalist system unaware of their original worth and capacity. The proposed new university must prepare an effective plan to eliminate the atmosphere of unawareness found in existing university structures. Only then will it be possible that, rather than producing an army of intellectually immature graduates, our universities will create a generation of intelligent-minded people furnished both with reflective skills together with the determination of leaders and the courage to change the world. Instead of graduating technicians obliviousness to the higher aims of life, who are always prepared to sell themselves to international companies for minimum profits, the new universities must produce people deeply cognisant of the frauds of the contemptible current system who are alive to the real value of life and its unlimited opportunities, and therefore would not be able to tolerate the conditions that obtain at present. A new institution of learning will have to produce ulema (teachers) who are true polymaths. In addition, the kind of educational syllabus must be put in place that can empower students to face new changes rather than becoming instruments in the hands of an already declining capitalistic system.

The proposed university will have to be vigilant with full knowledge of the realities and possibilities of life. Its faculty and students must perform their duty as a lighthouse or an astrolabe. But this would not mean its graduates would limit themselves to preaching morality or engaging in religious instruction, nor would pride in their knowledge imprison them within the ivory tower. Our purpose is not simply to create a new world of thoughts, nor do we aim at forming an irrational and unworkable utopia. We are attempting to recreate the worldview which following the revelation of the Holy Qur'an gave birth to a scientific movement of discovery and due to which the followers of Muhammad were given the responsibility of scripting a novel history for humanity. The idea of establishing a new university in the light of the Qur'anic worldview is not at all aimed at restoring the environment of the Middle Ages rather it will apprise the nations of the world in these changed times of a new impassioned life, which will only be possible within an institution that is pragmatic and implementational. For instance, the university will have to focus its research and analysis on providing people with the basic necessities of food, clothing and a roof over their heads; it would look at what presently is called organic food which common people do not have access to, and work toward the possibility of making general availability of organic foods. So far, the engineers of the existing, outdated, declining capitalist order have considered construction of skyscrapers and high rise towers as the apogee of their skills. They have absolutely no concept of future energy supplies becoming depleted, when the excessive use of energy will result in the destruction of the environment and people will be compelled to abandoned their high rise buildings which will then fall to rubble.

Those that still engage in teaching and learning about this form of architecture are practitioners of an outdated pattern of thinking. On the contrary, all attention should now be placed on planning residences that function with the minimum use of energy, which cause nil environmental pollution, and which because they are in harmony with nature will present a picture of heaven on earth. This vision of a happy life cannot be realised unless teachers in subjects like environmentalism, engineering, earth sciences, architecture, electronics, agriculture and sociology, or polymath personalities, come together to participate in this plan. Since ancient times, we have been using various sources of natural energy. Despite their harmony with the environment, windmills and watermills cannot fulfill our present or future needs. After the discovery of atomic energy efforts have turned toward obtaining energy by fusion. Without doubt, in the future those who are in a position to control the sources of energy will also have the power to determine the priorities of the nations of the world. Our proposed university will need to take these challenges fully into account so that it can make a

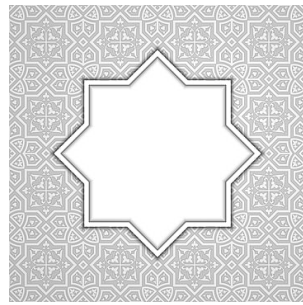


comprehensive evaluation and analysis of various types of research in operation in the modern world. We have not arisen with the aim of establishing an alternative military-industrial-complex. Nevertheless, we are not unaware of the fact that in each historical phase those who have led the nations of the world possessed a knowledge and understanding of all types of technology, as made clear in this verse from the Holy Qur'an: '... and We bestowed (upon you) from on high (the ability to make use of) iron, in which there is awesome power as well as (a source of) benefits for man' [57:25]. Unless we effectively defend ourselves against B-52 bomber planes, drone attacks and other similar military technology or develop the ability to invent alternative weapons, we will not be able to do away with political subordination and psychological slavery. At present, the job of hired intellectuals and salaried scholars and consultants seems to be to make us maintain the psychology of an inferior nation. Hence, we must bypass them and think independently rather than rely on their analyses. They will never cooperate with us in the process of establishing academic institutions based on a new mind and novel patterns of thought. We will have to take these steps independently.



SECTION XI

*Conclusion*



# Manifesto of the United Islam

Are you a Muslim? One could only wish that the answer was in the affirmative. But, unfortunately, this is actually not the case. When you ask a Muslim what type of a Muslim he is; which group or juristic school he belongs to; which group or spiritual guide he subscribes to; he is a Shia or Sunni, Isma'ili or Ibadi, Hanafi or Shafei, follows the Deobandi school or Salafi way, it renders our claim redundant that we are nothing but 'Muslims' true in faith [حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا] and practice nothing but Islam.

This day, when the number of Muslims has risen from a quarter to two billion and there is no significant spot in this world where a Muslim presence is unknown, it seems nothing less than shocking that in this multitude of humanity those are very rare, if not altogether nonexistent, who call themselves only Muslims and insist on this identity alone. All of us are prisoners to different types of sectarianism and each Muslim is identified by his respective sect. Not only that, within each sect there are various juristic sub-sects and thus division within a division is continuing as an ongoing process in each camp. A modern Muslim believes therefore that in order to be and remain a Muslim he should first of all be a Shia or a Sunni. And if he is a Sunni, he should also inevitably subscribe to one of the four juristic Sunni sects. This is the minimum splitting without which being a Muslim is thought unimaginable. Now, who should tell them that this sectarian groupism arising in the name of jurisprudence and schools of thought violates, rather militates against, the Islamic call to monotheism?

Belief in one God unifies human beings in respect of unconditional submission to Him. In this eternal relationship all find themselves useful and helpful to others, be they Arab or non-Arab, black or white, rich or poor, masters or slaves. Bilal of Ethiopia and Salman of Persia all construct an international brotherhood of the faithful in Islam. Despite their different national and geographical origins, they all share the same religious, community, political, geographic interest once they enter the fold of monotheism. They live and die for the same goal. On the contrary, Shias and Sunnis of our day persist in separate compartments despite their allegiance to Islam. Their community interests are separate, their books are separate, and their religious ulema

are separate; so much so, that even their mosques are separate. Not only Shias and Sunnis, but other sects of Muslims too such as Isma'ilis or Ibadis or latter-day upholders of Salafi, Jama'ati, Deobandi, and Barelvi dogmas, have all separated their mosques. Now which mosque belongs to which sects can easily be found out by the set of religious books placed in those mosques! Just look around and the fact cannot remain hidden from your eyes that whether it is mosques or religious madrasas these have all become pits of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and sectarianism, though apparently they may glint with the exotic sheen of religiosity and the echo 'God is Great' may resound from their minarets. Instead of being places reserved for the worship of One God, these have been reduced to sites exploited for upholding the banner of sectarian faith. Sadly, very sadly, there is no escape from stating that such places are no longer centres of monotheism, but bastions of *shirk* [polytheism] and sectarianism, which have been active like the virus working against Islam and Muslims right from within the Muslim society. Since these centres survive under the façade of piety and righteousness, we do not normally feel the need to raise a loud and clear voice against them even though we may be fully aware of this alarming situation. This comment of ours against sectarian schools of thought and their mosques is not a result of our heightened emotion but owing to the Qur'anic edict addressed to the Prophet which our holy ulema are certainly not unaware of: as for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least [6:159].

Sectarianism is associationism (*shirk*). Those who fan sectarian bias or uphold the banner of group identity or prefer for themselves an identity other than Islam and Muslim and exhaust their energies in promoting that, are in fact the people who take to the path of *shirk* by turning away from One God. No hue of Islam can be spotted in such people. Just think how painful it is that the followers of the same Prophet have got fragmented into different sects and that too in the name of religion or religious thought itself. The Shia madrasas are busy proving the Shia version of Islam to be the most accurate and Sunnis to be depraved. On the other side, the Sunni madrasas have been exerting themselves for centuries to prove the standpoint of Sunnis (*ahl-sunnah wa al-Jamaah*, i.e. upholders of the Prophet's way and mainstream Muslims) to be the actual way of the faithful. And within these Sunni madrasas, Shafeis are busy exalting and glorifying the ulema of their school of thought, and Hanefis proudly believe that nothing could be more useful for appreciation of religion than the authority of the elders' pronouncements. If God has given us a little insight, we cannot fail to see that in mosques, madrasas and monasteries, which our illusory perception shows us as Islam's castles, the process of falsifying Islam and glorifying and lionizing one's own

sectarian faith is going on in fullest frenzy. In one place, pupils are being trained for the academic crusade against Shi'ism, and in the other, preparations are in full swing to raze the castle of Barelvi faith to the ground. In one place, mock-debates are held to prove the Deobandi school to be the most authentic and best, and in the other, struggle is on to ever widen the circle of spiritual allegiance to a certain holy figure. This condemnable business of promulgating sectarianism and groupism in the name of religion is constantly inflicting wounds on the ummah from within. Whatever pretensions of mutual tolerance and generosity may be claimed by these conflicting interpretations of religion, as well as sects and factions resulting from them, the truth of the matter is that the very survival of these sects gets nourishment from the process of mutual nullification and condemnation. Suppose, Shias withdraw their political case against Sunnis, they would have no justification to continue believing in the twelve imams as divinely appointed and following them. Similarly, if Sunnis abstain from accusing Shias of heresy, they would have no justification for ignoring the twelve imams in their religious life. Shias and Sunnis cannot become perfectly united and this fragmented ummah cannot become a force to reckon with until Shias give up their Shi'ism and Sunnis discard their Sunnism. Apparently though this seems quite an uphill task, it is not altogether impossible if hearts are ablaze with the real intention of rejecting *shirk* and embracing monotheism.

Over the past thousand years, both sects have pursued a policy of sheer hypocrisy which is labeled 'authentic faith' by each. It is the policy of mutual tolerance and coexistence in public and of mutual condemnation and dismissal in private. Undoing a hypocritical process of such kind or correcting a deviation spanning a thousand years of our history is doubtless a daunting task. However, after a millennium-long painful experience we are now in a much better position to realize than ever before that unless we are united internally and until we set in order our own house first we will never be able to undertake a decisive engagement with the enemy abroad.

Just think! Isn't this a fact that when Mongol invaders were hesitant to enter Baghdad on account of the symbolic spiritual awe of the Abbasid caliph, just then they enjoyed the support and encouragement of a Shia religious authority, Nasiruddin Tusi, for destroying the Sunni caliphate? Similarly, when the same Mongols desired to annihilate the remnants of the Fatimid caliphate in the Castle of Alamut, they enjoyed the physical presence and support of a Sunni religious authority, Alauddin Ata Malik Juwaini. We were split into different compartments around the fourth century when we also saw the rise of mutually competing caliphates in our midst. Since then, our energies have mostly been wasted on strengthening our own sect and destabilising the

other sects. Institutions of religious sciences (*uloom shari'a*) mushroomed all over the Muslim lands in the wake of the establishment of the Al-Azhar University of the Fatimid era, which was actually started to propagate the Fatimid school of religious thought. Can we deny the fact that all such institutions were initially brought into existence to counter the onslaught of Fatimid thought? Just to counterbalance Isma'elite or Fatimid Islam, the Nizamia madrasa of Baghdad was brought into existence and Sufi centres and monasteries were encouraged to operate as well. Thus, from the fourth century onwards, in the name of religious science the factories of political and religious sectarianism became operational all around the Islamic world. The Fatimid and Abbasid caliphates had their inevitable fall and vanished into thin air of history in the due course of time, but till this moment we have not been able to get rid of factionalism and group and sectarian identity engendered in that period. Rather, the truth is that these heretic and deviant interpretations of our faith have relentlessly bolstered and toughened factionalism and group bias with the passage of time. The result is that today one may hardly if ever find someone who dares to declare that he is just a Muslim, first and last, and that he has nothing to do with identities such as Shia, Sunni, Isma'ili, Ibadi, Alavi, Daruzi, Qadiani etc. And that he is not a believer in any Abu Hanifa or Shafei or Jafar Al-Sadiq etc.

### NEED FOR A FRESH START

Actually it looks quite strange that one may cast doubt on the foundations of sectarianism which is considered a namesake of Islam and which is taken by the majority of Muslims to be Muhammad's Message, rather than on *shirk*. The thought may possibly cross your mind that what is needed today is to declare those foundations suddenly unreliable upon which have thrived various forms of sectarianism in the name of real Islam and which have been in practice for about a thousand years. During that time a large number of ulema and thinkers were born as well as interpreters, spokesman and ideologues. Why on earth did they not point to the grand deviation that I am doing today after about a thousand years? This period saw the rise of theologians like Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiya on the one hand, and on the other revivalists like Shah Waliullah and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. Then, in the twentieth century appeared on the horizon, after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate, pupils of Afghani, fans of Iqbal, movements of Hasan al-Banna, Maulvi Ilyas and Abul Ala Maududi, but none of them called for doing away with this deviation, root and branch. They all shared an attitude of carrying forth this bundle of contradictions since, they assumed, this deviation is beyond human power to correct and this is a



chronic ailment incurable in nature. Shah Waliullah, for instance, advances the idea that the real schools of thought are just two — Hanafi and Shafei — which automatically assimilate and blend in the other two. He is not able in any way to rid himself of the false thought that, as he says, the emergence of the four imams is from God. Ghazali was anyhow taken to be the advocate of the Abbasid stance for writing *Fadaih al-Batiniya*. However, even Ibn Taymiya, who simultaneously enjoys the status of a fighter and a revivalist, is no different. He does consider the twelve imams of Shias a deviation, but has no answer to the Shia scholar Allama Hilli's objection that if the concept of twelve imams is false, what is the religious justification then for the four Sunni imams? If you read the books of different sects and try to understand their standpoints, you will be dismayed to know that the issues upheld by them as matters of faith in their respective sectarian circles, with which their religious institutions reverberate, are in fact echoes of political factionalism of the bygone era, having nothing to do with Islam or its goals. The hard fact is that these factional interpretations have distorted the form of the clear faith of Islam and degraded and defiled it to the worst possible extent. We cannot realize this until we muster up courage to go through the religious books of all those sects with equal objectivity.

As for the suggestion that this deviation must be embraced because a period of one thousand years has passed over it or factionalism must be tolerated because it has thrived for centuries, this is really strange. Must a patient do nothing to cure his disease if it has gone chronic? This attitude fails to win the support of the Qur'an or the divine law or even reason. Islam is unequivocal in its clear condemnation of 'that-is-how-we-found-our-ancestors-do' attitude. The Qur'an demands we place no reliability in the elders' sayings or ancestral practices if they are in conflict with Revelation and Reason. Just as the Qur'anic revelation united the early Muslim society on the principle of monotheism, the modern-day followers of Muhammad, in his absence, carry the burden of perpetually correcting their direction in the light of the intact and infallible message of the Qur'an. That is to say, it is incumbent upon those in the ummah who are at the helm of affairs to constantly review and revise their thoughts and actions in the light of the Qur'an and the holy practice (sunnah), of which the Holy Qur'an itself is the most authentic source, in the absence of the Prophet. Then, they may hold on to whatever they find in agreement with, and unhesitatingly reject whatever appears in conflict with it. And they should not be daunted by the fact that it carries the support of centuries-old deviant historical process and the espousal of the words and deeds of simple-minded ancestors.

Now consider this matter from another angle! Just the antiquity of a deviation or its present popularity should not automatically become evidence of its validity. Neither does a deviation of this nature or mistake forgo the opportunity of reform just because of its antiquity. Aren't you aware of the fact that Faraj bin Barquq, reckoned by historians among the worst rulers, installed separate musallas (prayer areas) for four Sunni jurists in the ka'aba mosque in his frustration resulting from the unending sectarian conflicts? As a result, the one ummah continued offering prayers in the same sacred mosque behind four different imams. A great many scholars lived through this prolonged period in the ummah, but none dared to put an end to this deviation, until the Najdi reform movement once again united the people behind one imam after they occupied Hijaz in the early twentieth century. Now, after a lapse of three quarters of a century, none feels in his remotest imagination that the rolling back of the four separate musallas has caused any harm or deficiency to our prayers in the ka'aba mosque. So, there is no reason to consider other deviations of the same nature irredeemable.

One could only wish we had realized that the constant drop in our national graph is due to our mutual ideological clashes, which have caused different groups such as Shia, Sunni, Hanefi, Barelvi, Deobandi and a host of others to be perpetually at war with one another. This flood of mutual hatred raging over a thousand years seems uncontainable. Rather, its current has been gathering greater momentum with the passage of time. In this situation, how can this ummah imagine for itself a peaceful and bright future, let alone the leadership role unto the nations of the world?

An ostrich-like attitude may just delay these matters a little. It can however offer no solution to the problems, but rather further aggravate their intensity and severity. Our reformers have parroted for centuries the notion that Shias and Sunnis and others are all justified in their respective positions, and therefore the four Sunni schools of thought offer authentic forms of religion despite their mutual discord and disarray. Delusions of this sort have in fact hindered us from developing a realistic perception of actual issues. It is no more good saying that all those are equally just who have relinquished the God-given identity of 'Muslim' and who are given to sect-worship, imam-worship, ulema-worship, and other worships of the same nature and for whom upholding the banner of their respective sect or group is dearer than upholding the banner of One Great God. To project such a view is to deny both 'Revelation' and 'Reason.' The Qur'an clearly dictates in this respect, as mentioned above, that '[O Muhammad], those who fanned factionalism in faith and got split into sects, you have nothing to do with them.' Anyone with a horse's sense must not be unaware of the fact that those who sought an identity for themselves distinct from that of the Muslim

ummah did in fact raise the banner of revolt against the path of the faithful. The interest of the ummah and its strength lie in the demise of factions. How is it possible then that all those who have invented un-Islamic identities for themselves to replace the identity of 'Muslim' alone and those who became Shia, Sunni, Hanafi and Shafei, and who let the unmistakable divine rope slip from their hands are at the same time equally just?

### PROPHETIC VS. HISTORICAL ISLAM

The emergence of factionalism and the establishment of political, juristic, and racial camps among Muslims took place in different periods of history. The Islam of the earliest phase was totally devoid of such blemishes and pollutions. If we develop an overall perception of our intellectual history, to an extent it would become much easier for us to overcome factional bigotry and to appreciate opponents' points of view.

In the first three centuries of Islam, Muslims were one ummah despite all their intellectual or perspectival differences. Factionalism in the name of religion did not exist anytime from Hazrat Othman's martyrdom to the civil wars of Jamal and Siffin and even during the Umayyad or Abbasid upheavals. Though some major or minor rebellions were espoused during this time by the members of Ahl-e-bait, prior to the consolidation of Aal-e-Buwaih's rule none ever saw it as even the remotest possibility that the Twelver (*ithna-ashari*) version of Islam could ever be a bearer of a distinct ideological identity. Neither did the Isma'ilites' hidden interpretations of Islam enjoy the status of an alternative and absolute ideology prior to the caliphate of the Fatimids, nor had the contours of Sunni Islam taken a distinct shape before the emergence of Abbasids on the political horizon. At that time, the whole ummah was a grand unity in spite of its intellectual and conceptual differences. To label someone as *ithna-ashari*, *sab'iyya*, or *qata'iyya* etc. was considered no more than the adversary's propaganda. Some called themselves the 'upholders of justice and firmness' and others thought their standpoint was representative of the Muslim mainstream. For the first three centuries the circles of scholars, the schools of hadith and jurisprudence, and the hadith collections were considered common heritage of all groups. The Bukhari and the Muslim, as well as dozens of other similar collections mentioned in the historical records, were of equal interest for all schools of thought. These hadith anthologies carried traditions with both Shia and Sunni slants at the same time. Till this day, Shia traditions like '*khimra-e-namaz*' or '*mut'ah*' occupy the place of pride in *Sahih Muslim*. Besides, the Bukhari still carries the anecdote that the Prophet on his deathbed desired his will to be written down but Omer insisted on declining his wish saying 'God's Book is sufficient for us.' This and a host of other traditions which Shias resort to for

the validity of their stance are still found in the Bukhari. The fact is that until the fourth century a clear-cut Shia-Sunni division on religious grounds had not taken place. Therefore, the compilers of hadith, such as Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, were considered representatives of the common attitude of the ummah. However, when Shias produced their own separate hadith collections in the first quarter of the fourth century, the discarded collections were automatically taken to be Sunni sources of hadith. The entire project of collecting and compiling the distinct Shia thought, which eventually rendered Shias into a separate conceptual group, was accomplished under the aegis of Aal-e-Buwaih's rule. Kulaini's collections of hadith would have survived as an academic achievement alone if they had not been adopted as the primary source material during Aal-e-Buwaih's rule. If *Nahjul Balaghah* had not been edited and compiled by Sharif Razi and Murtaza and if, around the same period, the shrines of Najaf and Karbala had not come into existence, a separate form of Shia Islam also would not have been born. Similarly, if the Fatimid caliphate had not been established in Cairo; Da'aa'imul Islam had not been taught at Jamia al-Azhar; an army of ulema and propagators had not been created for establishing the validity of Isma'ili imamate; and Isma'ili callers (*da'i*) disguised as Sufis had not reached the cities of Multan, Kirman, Delhi and Ajmer, Isma'ilite Islam would not have enjoyed any authenticity nor panjtan (pentacorpus) would have carried extraordinary sanctity as ahl-e-bait for the Muslim masses. If the Abbasid caliphate had not been established, our Friday sermons would have been devoid of encomiums for the progeny of Abbas. Political incidents, therefore, can be seen at work behind all these different interpretations and versions of our religion. It is momentary political exigencies that ruthlessly subjugated religion to their ulterior motives. Whereas these political entities and empires melted, sooner or later, into the thin mist of history, the factionalism and viciousness generated by them still remain an active source of evil for us. For a fresh start, it is but necessary for us that we read history as history. We should not misread into it religion as such. The former attitude motivates us to derive lessons of wisdom from history, whereas the latter drives us to a point where we ourselves become a lesson in history.

#### A GLANCE AT CERTAIN KEY DEVIATIONS

What divides the Sunni and Shia sects from one another is their conflicting stances regarding caliphate or imamate. Twelver (*ithn-ashari*) Shias believe the twelve imams to be divinely chosen and installed. Isma'ilites who initially believed in seven imams now place their faith in a chain of living imams. The Sunni belief in the four caliphs has become an article of their faith. Nevertheless, in actual fact, the four juristic

imams, or fuqaha, have for centuries commanded their religious life. Now, if we look at the whole matter with an open mind, a little surface scratching is sufficient to tell us that all these dogmas have nothing to do with Islam. These are nothing but different readings of Islam worked out in different periods of history much after Islam had been perfected. It is wholly senseless, therefore, to garb them with the holy aspect of religious dogma. The received concept of the four caliphs took shape during the Abbasid ruler, Mutawakkil. The common understanding prior to that was that the martyrdom of Hazrat Othman had put an end to the collective politics of Muslims. The four and a half year long period of Hazrat Ali remained fraught with civil wars. A large part of the Levant never accepted and Muslims could not reach unanimity on his caliphate. That is why, a mention of only three caliphs was considered sufficient during Muawiya's rule. However, during the Abbasid period, general expediency inclined Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal to include Hazrat Ali as the fourth righteous caliph. He did this to make his caliphate part of a Sunni political stance. Still, this pragmatic step had up to his time been considered no more than an effort to read history in a fresh manner. This stance gained a quick and wide currency owing to Hazrat Ali's personal merit and in view of his grand services. The Abbasids' need of political stability of also warranted that they should be capable of winning the confidence of all Muslim factions. So along with the four imams, a mention of the excellence of ahl-e-bait also became a part of the Friday sermons. Soon, along with the prayers such as 'O God, forgive the Abbasids' and 'He established the caliphate in them,' the pulpits echoed with the cries like 'lords of the youth in paradise' and 'Fatima, lady of the females in paradise.' There is no doubt that this attitude of tolerance and desire to project a unified Islam played a significant role in generating an air of authenticity and acceptability for the Abbasid rule among Muslim masses. But since these political steps were taken under the garb of Islam and the coming generations saw it as a construal of faith, these acquired by and by the status of Sunni dogma. On the other side, we have the concept of twelve imams, upon which rests today the edifice of Shia Islam. But the truth of the matter is that even the elders of the ahl-e-bait were not aware of this chain of imams. The list with a standard sequence of twelve imams as it is known today is considered a part of faith by Shia ulema, but no such list existed in Jafar Al-Sadiq's day. We know when Zaid bin Ali rebelled, he did not enjoy his brother Muhammad al-Baqar's active or even tacit support. If Shias of those days had known that Muhammad al-Baqar was the divinely appointed imam, how would his brother Zaid have been in the dark about it? In that case, how would it have been possible for him to initiate an uprising on his own without the consent of the imam of the day? Neither was

Muhammad bin Hanafia, the non-Fatimid son of Hazrat Ali, aware in the least of this Hasani-Husaini string of imams whose rebellious acts and their aftermath continued to bother Abbasids for quite some time later. Otherwise, why would he have thought it necessary to initiate rebellious campaigns on his own? During the Umayyad and Abbasid rule, about sixty major and minor revolts were carried out by different groups of ahl-e-bait, besides Imam Husain's. Had they been aware of any revealed sequence of these divinely appointed imams, they would certainly not have felt the need to initiate those rebellions on their own in the very presence and without the approval of those imams. So the alleged list of imams, acquaintance with which is considered a matter crucial for the soundness of Shia faith, was unknown to the circles of ahl-e-bait of the early period. What on earth could be the reason then to declare it the basis of faith? On this heavenly chain of the imamate disagreement always persisted even among the different groups of Shias of ahl-e-bait in every phase of history. Even today, Isma'ilites, Twelvers, and other Shia factions maintain their independent existence and identities on the very same grounds. All this intellectual and perspectival muddle, whether in Sunnis or in Shias, is a direct fallout of reading religious dogma into history or taking history as religious dogma. Just imagine when Ali was a sovereign caliph, when his absolute rule swayed over a large part of the Muslim land, did he allow or promote separate azans (call to prayer) for Shias, or did he levy the *khums* money from his followers in the name of *sahm-e-imam*? If this was not the case, why are his followers insistent today upon a new azan and a new religious identity? Are they not repudiating their own exalted imam thus? Similar is the case of the upholders of *ahl-e-sunnat wa al-jama'at*, who have accorded the sanctity of religious faith to the historical narrative of the four imams, whose critique they believe would pull down the ramparts of Sunni Islam. The concept of the four caliphs is no more than an expression of a fossilized dogma. But the reality of the imams who practically command their religious life is that they had gained a great mastery in the *kalami fiqh* (dialectical jurisprudence) like many other experts in the field. These four imams maintained their seminaries in their day like a number of other ulema of their ilk such as Awza'i, Sufian Thawri, Laith bin Sa'd, Sufian bin Ainiya, Ibn Rahwaih, Dawood Zahiri, Jarir Tabari and many others. Imam Malik first incurred Mansoor's wrath and then won his favour because of which his book *Mu'atta* had almost become the officially adopted fiqh. And another faqih of the same period, Laith bin Sa'd, due to his uncompromising attitude shrank to a non-entity on the social horizon despite his awesome academic grandeur. So much so, that even the details of his school of thought were not preserved for the future. Under the care of Qazi Abu Yusuf the Hanafi fiqh won the patronage of the government. And

during Mutawakkil's regime, Ibn Hanbal became the religious advisor to the ruler which catapulted him into fame as a faqih. Otherwise, in his own day and for long afterwards, he was known to ulema only as an expert of hadith and they were reluctant to recognize him as a jurist or faqih. Traditionally, Egypt had been a stronghold of the pupils of Shafei. But during the reign of the Mamluks when it was felt necessary to weaken the strength of Shafei chief justice, the political leadership thought of installing alternative judicial courts. Baibars, who had earned extraordinary admiration for repelling a formidable Mongol army at Ain Jalut, appointed four different judicial courts with a view to seeking a sort of compromise among the four different, mutually exclusive and perpetually conflicting, schools of fiqh. Who knew then that the decision of an army general, unaware of religion and religious expediencies, would acquire intransience as well as sanctity, and Muslims would take it binding upon them to follow only one of those four imams? If Baibars had not appointed separate judges for these four schools of fiqh, these imams would have remained just a part of our intellectual history like dozens of other grand *fuqaha* (experts of jurisprudence) of more or less similar stature and nothing more. They would never have risen to the grandeur of the skippers of Sunni Islam.

Put it this way, to be brief, if alternative regimes had not arisen among Muslims on grounds of political differences; if Umayyad rulers of Andalusia, Fatimid rulers of Cairo, and Abbasid rulers of Baghdad had not erected separate political castles of their own; and if they had not resorted to religion for seeking the *raison d'être* for their respective politics, these different versions of Islam with distinctive identities would never have seen the light of day.

#### **DIVINE RELIGION: HUMAN REFERENCES**

As we know, divinely revealed Islam had been perfected in every respect during the very lifetime of the Prophet, as is evident from the Qur'anic verse 'Today I perfected your religion for you.' Have you ever considered why on earth there should be a need for human references in the divinely revealed religion? To assert its verity the Qur'an advances the argument that 'had it been from someone other than God, you would have found in it a lot of contradiction.' Hence, if you do not see elements of conflict in the Qur'anic injunctions, it is because it is from God. Otherwise, had this religion been a product of human intellect, it would have been replete with intellectual and conceptual differences. The reason behind the existence of so many versions of Islam follows the same principle; in their making human intellect has played a lot greater role than divine revelation. All deviations ensue from human interpretations

and explanations in fact. The infallible and intact heavenly scripture of the heavenly religion Islam is still extant in all its pristine glory. How could the upholders of this religion then tolerate identities for themselves such as Hanefi, Shafei, Zaidi, Ja'afri, Salafi, Isma'ili and so on? Isn't it extremely awful? How could it be possible for Abul Hasan Ash'ari to become the interpreter and spokesman of Sunni Islam and for his charter of dogmas to become an inevitable reference for the future generations? Whether it is Ash'ari or Maturidi, Wasil bin Ata or Mamun and Ibn Hanbal, all of them have transgressed the limits set by God, loud and clear, in the Qur'an: 'All of them believed in God, His angels and His books, and his prophets; we do not differentiate amongst any of the prophets.' After this comprehensive detail on the articles of faith, there was hardly any room for raking up issues such as divine predestination or free will (*jabr-o-qadr*), or the Qur'an being eternal or created, or various matters related to the Person or Attributes of God. There was no room for the matter of Hazrat Ali being the 'caliph sans break' or 'fourth caliph' to acquire the status of dogma rather than being a version of historical narrative. God sent only one religion and in His Book He clearly laid out the extents of permissible and impermissible, desirable and undesirable in explicit details. Where was the room then for declaring the same thing detestable by one jurist but permissible and tolerable by the other? Although human reason may falter in getting to the purport of the divine revelation, what is the justification for holding imperfect and faltering human reason to be the source of religion? In principle we all agree that the elders were also humans like us who were capable of doing both right and wrong. However, just as Shias, despite declaring about elders that 'they were (ordinary) men just as we are,' cannot set aside the compilations of Kulaini, Sheikh Mufid, Sharif Razi and Murtaza, and the caucus guru Tusi, Sunnis too do not dare to go beyond the four imams in order to rediscover for themselves the real prophetic contours of Islam. So much so, that those who claim to have given up *taqlid* (adherence to tradition) and who talk of direct culling from the Qur'an and sunnah, do not step beyond following the 'virtuous elders.' Now who should tell them that those whom they look upon as 'virtuous elders,' did not enjoy a status of holiness and trustworthiness when they lived? They often indulged in rivalry and conflict with their contemporaries. If one group of scholars consisted of their admirers and pupils, the other did not abstain from denouncing and falsifying their position and even blowing them out as 'unbelievers' (*kafir*). Khateeb Baghdadi has preserved for our instruction the mutual blame games and denunciation of the most outstanding jurists and their pupils. Even Bukhari and Muslim whose compilations today enjoy Qur'an-like sanctity and are held by some as



‘the most authentic after the Book of God’, were not non-controversial in their time. It is narrated that when the mutual discord between Ismail Bukhari and Muhammad bin Yahya Zahili intensified, it became difficult for Imam Muslim to decide which one of his teachers to support. Muslim ultimately distanced himself from Zahili. He went so far in his opposition to Zahili, and siding with Bukhari, that he loaded on camels all the copies of hadith acquired from Zahili and returned them to him. Just think, how different Muslim’s selection of hadith (*Sahih Muslim*) would have been, had the quarrel between the two compilers of hadith, Bukhari and Zahili, not so much intensified. There is no reason therefore that human compilations – based on human intellect for collection, edition, analysis and research – should be accorded the status of infallible religious sources. And that too in such a fashion that Sunni Islam should be based on the six canonized books of hadith (*sehad sittah*), and the Shia edifice be erected on the foundation of Kafi, Ibn Babwaih, Istibsar Tusi, and Nahjul Balaghah.

#### EMERGENCE OF RABBIS IN ISLAM

In the early centuries of Islam when the Qur’an was the only reference for our thoughts and deeds, none even imagined seeking guidance from elders. Then, it was possible for a Bedouin woman to publicly challenge Omer’s understanding of the Qur’an and for him in turn to realize his error right on the pulpit and withdraw his opinion, as it is narrated in history books on the issue of *mehr* (dower money). Abu Bakr Siddiq’s stance remained uncertain for lack of unanimity regarding those who refused to pay regular charity (*zakat*) to the government until they were granted release from imprisonment during Hazrat Omer’s time. When the understanding and inferences of exalted companions, such as Hazrat Abu Bakr and Omer, did not enjoy the status of religious diktat and ordinary Muslims considered it their right to challenge them on the authority of the Qur’an, it may be guessed how pivotal and central was the role of the Book of God then in the intellectual life of Muslims. The first generation Muslims had no qualms about the fact that Islam had directly linked man to his Creator. There was no need then for any go-between authority between man and God, such as the pope or spiritual elders. In crystal-clear terms the Qur’an had introduced Muhammad the Messenger as a prophet who would free people from the manacles of religious rituals, prohibitions and associations that had been placed upon them by self-styled religiosity, as it is said in the Qur’an ‘he lifts from them burden that had been placed upon them.’ But, unfortunately, this feature of Islam diminished in the time to come. Though this started with Shafei’s *Al-Risala*, the Islamic maulvi was fully chiseled out in the Fatimid era when the political version of

Islam assumed the level of religious knowledge. It led, in isolation from Darul Ilm, to the mushrooming of nizamia madrasa chains as well as the Sufi monasteries and lodges that echoed with the spiritual and religious sciences. The Qur'an is totally devoid of the term 'uloom shariah' (religious sciences). It tells us that declaring something permissible or impermissible (halal or haram) is the sole prerogative of God. So much so, that the Prophet's status is that of an interpreter of law and not that of a lawmaker, as he himself says: 'Verily I do not allow but what God allows in his Book, and I do not prohibit but what God prohibits in His Book.'

In loud and clear terms the Qur'an preserves the right of a 'religious edict' exclusively for God and for Him alone, as is evident from the verse addressed to the Prophet: 'They seek your fatwa concerning the women say: Allah gives you His fatwa about them.' In the presence of such a crystal-clear instruction, there was no theoretical need for the emergence of a class of maulvis and spiritual gurus – like pundits, fathers and rabbis – that may claim for itself exclusive mastery of religious knowledge and competence for issuing religious edicts. Alas, during the decline of Abbasid caliphate when the rulers had no choice but to acquiesce to occupiers and usurpers of political authority, they installed certain jurists as religious heads, in consideration of their public image as devout, pious and knowledgeable. Ulema and Sufis enjoyed public admiration and power-hungry Seljuks had the sword in their hands. The enfeebled and destabilised caliphate took refuge in seeking compromises with both these groups for the sake of its own survival. And thus, the caliphate that used to be a fine blend of both religious and political leadership simultaneously got split into separate compartments. This temporary pragmatism led to a major and irretrievable loss, which was that the person of caliph was reduced to just a puppet in the hands of ulema and sultans instead of being an effective authority. Since sultans had come to power by virtue of the sword, their illegitimacy was obvious to one and all. But ulema masqueraded in the guise of devotion and piety, and so their real intentions remained hidden from the common eye. In the course of time, therefore, they were acceptable as reliable and competent interpreters of Islam. Gradually, their verdicts and utterances came to be considered holy and sacrosanct. Though as long as Muslims maintained direct link with the divine revelation, acts and deeds of the elders could not prove fetters for them. What could be greater historical evidence for it than the fact that Hazrat Omer unhesitatingly altered during his time certain Prophetic precedents? For instance, regarding the distribution of conquered lands, or about 'heart-winning' [مؤلفة القلوب] steps, he adopted a policy different from the Prophet's sunnah or precedents.

At that time, the divine revelation for us was a beacon that maintained us on the highway of guidance each moment. Just contrast the attitude of creative revision and adaptation of the Prophet's precedents on one side, and on the other the tendency of insipid and bland imitation of the pronouncements of Shafei and Abu Yusuf. Just compare the two attitudes: realising the need to change the Prophet's precedents in response to the altered circumstances, and the condemnable attempt of seeking the purport of sharia in the writings of Shami and AlKasani. In the days to come the Seljuks who had created room for themselves in the political system of Islam by force became a part of history. The enfeebled Abbasid rule also breathed its last at the hands of Mongols. The priesthood, nevertheless, entrenched itself at the ideological centre of Islam, under the titles like legal experts, Sufis, spiritual caliphs, racial leadership etc., in such a way that this intrusion could not be repelled or uprooted despite numerous attempts. The belief became common that the ulama of Islam enjoyed the exclusive and unchallengeable right to the explication and interpretation of the faith, since they are the inheritors of the Prophetic knowledge; hence, on a par with the Israelite prophets in stature. This was a situation similar to what was created by Rabbi Akiva who declared that determining the meaning of the Torah was the exclusive right of the Talmudic interpreters, and when the latter openly asserted that 'once God entrusted us with the Torah, determining its meaning is solely our prerogative.' The emergence of this new priesthood laid a cordon of human interpretation and construal around the divine revelation. The pages of the Qur'an were shut off for the common man. Since the ulema had preserved solely for themselves the right of *ijtihad* and *tafaqquh* (independent thinking and reasoning) for which the final and decisive reference was the verdicts of the 'virtuous elders' rather than the infallible revealed scripture, so their concerted effort was to see to it that the Book of Guidance should not be allowed to be reopened. If that happened, they feared, there was a chance, rather an obvious threat, that the edifice of historical Islam would shake on its foundation, the authenticity and competence of the elders would fall to suspicion, and above all the current key position of the ulema would tumble down on its face. How then could they cut the branch they sat upon?

A number of endeavors have got underway towards reviving Islam in past centuries. But none of them goes beyond providing just a facelift to the same deviant and self-tailored historical Islam. Whether it is a suggestion to practice tolerance about the discordant *fiqh* of the four imams or to bridge the gap between Shias and Sunnis, or the glad tidings about discovering a legal ruse to circumvent the juristic rigors, rather tortures, of the verdicts of elders, all this but betrays our secret desire to cover

up our deviations. None dares to say a loud and clear good-bye to all these conceptual deviations and self-generated delusions. None has the guts to point out that the rubbish you have been disseminating in the name of Qur'anic sciences (*ulum-ul-Qur'an*) in your religious schools for such a long time is all useless, rather ruinous. The first generation of Muslims was certainly not aware of the existence of branches of the *ulum-ul-Qur'an* such as disputed *qira'ah* (recitation), useless debates around abrogator and abrogated verses, contradictory reports regarding the occasion of revelation, unreasonable and unintelligible issues about seven patterns of revelation (*sab'a ahraf*), baseless fables about the preferable and despicable business of talismanic charts, cut-charts and graphics. All these are man-made discourses and inventions of the later generations which were certainly not a part of the faith of the first generation Muslims.

What a great irony it is of the intellectual history of Muslims that when we were creatively integrated with the divine revelation, when this book guided us at every turn in our life, and when the followers of Muhammad thought it sufficient to advance a Qur'anic evidence in support of their stance, no schools of fiqh existed anywhere and none even imagined that he should use polemical terms like *farz* and *wajib*, *sunnat* and *nawaafil*, *makrooh* and *mubaah* etc. for getting to the meaning of sharia. At that time no generation of Islamic priests had come into existence that could think of defeating the purpose of sharia by categorizing an undesirable action into 'tolerable' and 'forbidden', or suggest ownership trickery towards gobbling up the orphan's possessions. Then none was called a 'maulana' and none was considered worthy of deified honorifics such as 'shaikh-ul-Islam' or 'Hujjat-ul-Islam.' Nor was there any '*Fazilat-al-Shaikh*,' nor '*Samahat-al-Shaikh*.' Nor was there '*Damat Barakatahum*' or even a bare 'maulvi.' This journey started from Shafei's *Al-Risala*, which ultimately ensued in the form of the 'ulema institution' in Islam, and this happened in the twilight of the ripping of the Abbasid caliphate and its decline. To be honest, this institution was an innovative deviation of such a stupendous magnitude in Islam that it reduced an invigorative and regenerative faith like Islam into a soulless and petrified ritualistic creed. With an eye on intellectual and academic history if we can visualise the shattering of caliphate as well as its enfeebling and ideological muddle generated thereby, it won't be hard for us to comprehend that no effort towards the attainment of unified Islam in future is expected to be fruitful unless we have guts to scrutinize and rethink the prevalent concept of 'religious sciences' [علوم شرعی] in the light of the Qur'an. So far the purport of the Qur'an has been subjected to the self-styled, corrupted and besmirched criteria of the so-called 'religious sciences.' It is but essential

now that the reign of scrutiny and rereading must once again be placed entirely and unreservedly into the hands of the Qur'an.

I am saying this because, right from the first, dialectical theology was allowed to intrude upon the codification of religion and fiqh in such a way that in the din of disputation and refutation of those days even our outstanding scholars could not estimate the extent of its harmfulness. At the behest of Abdur Rahman al-Mahdi, who desired that the academic and objective principles of faith-related inferencing be formulated, Shafie took up the cudgels to compose *Al-Risala*. In the days to come, unfortunately, the books written in this mode were more of the nature of extension of *Al-Risala*, instead of being critical readings of its pattern and methodology. *Al-Risala*, thus, gradually assumed the status of a sacred composition rather than a merely academic endeavor. You may put it this way if you wish that the growth and development of fiqh, in the days to come, mostly followed the direction set by the author of *Al-Risala*. To make it more clear, just consider this. Wasil bin Ata, who was mostly ignored during his own time for his mu'tazalite views, recommended four principles for the discovery of truth. First, the Qur'an should be consulted to find out what it says regarding the matter at hand. Secondly, the holy Practice of the Prophet (sunnah) should be explored to trace the relevant precedents if any. Thirdly, *ijma* (consensus) should be sought. If no clear guidance is possible through these three modes, *qiyas* ('speculation' meaning *ijtihad*, i.e. independent/analogical reasoning) should be exercised. In the days ahead these four principles came to be regarded as a grand 'magnificent method.' So much so, that these four principles became the source of deriving sharia law. Wasil bin Ata, probably, cannot be blamed for pulling the infallible source of the Qur'an down to the guesswork level of the other three sources. Nevertheless, this is what exactly happened in future. Each of these sources practically assumed in itself the position of a permanent feature. Some Qur'an interpreters, in order to stress the significance of *ijma*, went to the extent of declaring that the authenticity and intactness of the Qur'an is due to *ijma* alone. Abdullah bin Mas'ood, who did not consider the last two short chapters to be part of the Qur'an, kept quiet on the issue only due to *ijma*. According to this opinion, these last two surahs owe their existence till this day in the Qur'an to nothing but *ijma*. A little scratching beneath the surface may reveal the spurious nature of such reports, but the awe of the aforementioned four principles of fiqh has so much unnerved our interpreters that in backing them even their faith in the intactness of the Qur'an appears to slacken at times. We should also not lose sight of the fact that ever since the day of Shafei it has not been determined till date whether *ijma* implies consensus of ulema alone or it is

inclusive of the common people as well. Again, for *ijma* consensus of ulema and the public of only one city is required or it ought to be a comprehensive *ijma* of all cities and lands. Could the *ijma* of a particular city be equally valid for and binding on another city as well and could or could not the *ijma* of a particular period be similarly valid for another period? To reach a decisive answer regarding these issues related to *ijma* is still a far cry. We still do not know if ulema and *fuqaha* did ever actually have *ijma* on any single issue! Just think of the case of the five daily prayers! For Abu Hanefa, the Qur'an recitation in the first bowing (*rak'a*) is compulsory, whereas for Shafei it is compulsory in all bowings, for Malik in the first three bowings, and for Hasan Basari it is obligatory in the first bowing only. When no *ijma* could be reached till this day even on the obligatory (*farz*) prayer, how far the claim of *ijma* may be valid then regarding other issues is not hard to guess for an insightful person.

If this interpretative methodology had remained just an academic exercise, possibilities towards its modification, rather cleansing and reform, would have also existed. But unfortunately, it assumed the status of 'juristic principle' in absolute terms. Consequently, it was considered essential for all that they should also find out, over and above the Qur'anic *nuss* (explicit injunction/ruling), what the *ijma* and precedence have to offer about the issue at hand. Even though the Zahiri and Shia ulema rejected *qiyas*, they created room for a living mujtahid (independent legist) under other titles. It is similarly the case of the terms *istihsan* and *masalih mursalah*, which are actually no more than extensions of *qiyas* and *ijtihad*. This complicated procedure of discovering the purport of *wahi* shut the doors on the divine revelation for not only the public but for scholars as well.

### **SPIRITUAL CALIPHATE OR *PIRI MURIDI***

The cordon laid around the divine revelation by jurists made the ummah lose sight of its actual path. The communal and religious life of Muslims began revolving around the conflicting and clashing opinions of men of their own mould. None felt concerned any more to see what the Book of God had to say on a particular issue. But what they considered most important was what their sectarian school of thought said about it. When men subjugated men, the emergence of smaller spiritual gods and Islamic priests under various labels was but natural. This was exactly the pattern maintained by papalism prior to the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather, in the days to come, the church representatives also issued certificates towards sins or virtue or even for entry to paradise or hell. So whoever wished a satisfactory prearrangement for his salvation was able to have it against a payment affordable for him.

It is widely believed that the Prophet enjoys special distinction for his grand mission which was to free the necks of men from the yoke of slavery to self-declared masters and to put them under the direct care of God. One is just bewildered to note that among the followers of such a distinguished Prophet a new form of papalism appeared in the name of spiritual caliphate and piri-muridi. *Tasawwuf* emerged first as a cry of protest against the political abuse of religion and rampant materialism. It was exploited later as a movement by the Fatimids who wished to consolidate their political pursuit thereby and so they grabbed *tasawwuf* and cast it in their own political mould. Just realize the vast influence this secret movement wielded from the fact that during the Fatimid rule an Isma'elite dominion came into being in such a far-flung area as Multan. Right up to Mahmood Ghaznawi's invasion, Multan served as a busy headquarters for the Sufi movement of the Indian subcontinent. There is quite a lot of evidence pointing to the fact that a number of Sufis of the brand of Mu'inuddin Chishti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki etc. frequently visited this little Isma'elite city-state in North Western India. All leading Sufi figures, such as Usman Haruni, Bahauddin Zakaria, Nizamuddin Awliya, Ali Hijveri, Baba Farid, and Shahbaz Qalandar etc. were in truth revered and determined Isma'elite missionaries. Their secret mission was to work towards strengthening and expanding the Isma'elite state of Fatimid syeds. No doubt, by establishing the hidden caliphate the Fatimids largely compensated for their political deficit. It is also undeniable that by the sheer power of their stanchness and stealthy style of work, the basic message of Islam reached even those areas where the political conditions were highly hostile rendering them quite impenetrable. However, the concept of Islam that these Sufis propagated was actually the exaggerated Isma'elite version, which was based on concepts such as Ali's superiority, pentacorpous, monism, and the miraculous powers of the spiritual master of Alawi descent. Dozens of Sufi shrines and monasteries, centers of pilgrimage attracting for centuries throngs of common people, have been in truth the clandestine centers of the Isma'elite mission. Little wonder then that most of the Sufi terms such as *pir*, *murid*, *shariat*, *tariqat*, *batin*, and *zahir* etc. are but fabrications of these very Sufis.

The Abbasid caliphs too were not unaware of the rising popularity of the so-called *awliyaAllah* (mystic saints or Sufis). It is quite possible that the Naqshbandi line that traces its origin to Hazrat Abu Bakr, rather than to Hazrat Ali, had enjoyed their backing. Most of the holy figures of our history who use for themselves the title '*muhiuddin*,' (one who revives religion) for instance, Ibn Arabi or Abdul Qadir Jilani, bear a clear Fatimid signature on their writings or speeches and even on their gestures and mannerism. Maulana Rumi (of the fame of *Mathnavi*) holds a very high status in

the Isma'elite call who, despite his personal academic grandeur, prefers to remain a disciple of the Isma'elite imam Shamsuddin (Shams Tabrez). Shahrastani is apparently held in high esteem in Sunni thought. But he too holds the highest position of '*da'i al-du'at*' (lit: 'caller of callers,' meaning 'leader of missionaries') in the Isma'elite mission. The writings of geniuses like Attar, Sa'adi, Shabistari, Nasafi etc., who have played an important role in structuring the Sunni mind, betray veiled Fatimid links. In this particular respect, the Isma'elite missionaries organized behind the façade of spiritual caliphate an extraordinarily successful worldwide movement. Though they could not get an opportunity to establish a state in the subcontinent after the fall of Multan, for sure their spiritual caliphs and their successors brought a vast chunk of Muslim population under their active and lasting influence.

Who would be ready to believe today that this retail of spiritual caliphate or pirimuridi is mere scum of a political movement of the past, which is not even remotely connected with the divine revelation and the natural temper of Islam? On the contrary, Islam is totally against the idea of man entrusting the most delicate matter of his salvation to men like him or that someone should interpose between man and God as a heavenly representative. Even after its collapse the Fatimid movement, which joined the call to the caliphate with a claim to racial preeminence, remained a source of the various confusions which arose in Muslim thought. Even today, the personality of Agha Khan for Nizari Isma'ilites is an imam of such exalted station that God Himself is manifested in him. The remainders of the Musta'ali Isma'ilites, on the other hand, are at the mercy of different missionaries (*da'is*) who are busy with the profitable commerce of granting them salvation in exchange for *haqq-e-imam* (imam's right in their earnings) and other gifts. Manifestation of the 'blessings and abundance' of the grave-dweller continues in favour of the custodians of mausoleums even among the successors of Sufis who are apparently looked upon as the trustworthy holders of the spiritual leadership of Sunni Islam. This situation has kept the ummah divided into various spiritual 'paths' and 'brotherhoods.' One is shocked to see that the people whom God and His Prophet have not appointed to the spiritual leadership of the ummah and who enjoy no Qur'anic or even rational backing for their claim to accepting allegiance or distributing '*khil'at*,' have so callously carried on this despicable commerce under the guise of piety and holiness.

The first thing to understand is that allegiance (*bay'ah*) in the social life of Muslims is reserved for only '*amirul mominin*' (i.e. leader of the faithful), that is the caliph of the day. And for a caliphate to be valid the executive power is an essential condition. The righteous caliphs took over the position of *ulul amr* (executive



authority) as his successors in the absence of the Prophet. As far as the chatter is concerned, a particular Sufi has sought the permission of another Sufi to accept allegiance, or such and such has appointed such and such his *khalifa* or bestowed upon him *khilat*, or assigned him to the spiritual dominion of Delhi or Ajmer – all this is sheer nonsensical gibberish of the grossest kind having nothing to do with Islam. Some of our esteemed ulema, most of whom were a product of and indebted to the same aberrant and rotten Sufi chains, accorded not only legitimacy to this make-believe caliphate but themselves contributed to such an absurd and outrageous activity. For a common Muslim, therefore, it is hard to understand today that the despicable business of piri-muridi, profitable grave trade, and the claims of spiritual powers of the grave-dweller, are such assumptions for which no evidence could be found in the Qur'an or sunnah. It is beyond our comprehension that the soul of a man, however perfect a saint or wali he was, should assume extraordinary spiritual power after three or four hundred years of his death, as Shah Waliullah opines. As a student of the Qur'an it is also difficult for us to digest that the emergence of different Sufi chains is due to some heavenly plan, or certain chains are heavenly blessed with linkages like Siddiqi, Faruqi, or Alawi and some others are graced with a blend of many linkages. One wonders where Shah sahib got such information from and what was his means of communication with the divine world. Though we may never know, we know for certain that until such anti-Qur'anic, absurd and meaningless concepts are scraped from the mind of the ummah, and until ordinary Muslims are freed once again from mental slavery to priesthood, the Muslim ummah will remain divided as ever into mutually conflicting factions as well as cut off from the divine revelation.

### RACIAL LEADERSHIP

Islam is strongly against racial or ancestral pride. In the Islamic society it is totally insignificant whether one is Arab or non-Arab, or whether one belongs to a privileged family of whatever high social rank. Only one criterion is valid here to judge one's distinction and that is *taqwa* or piety. The Qur'anic declaration that 'the most respectable among you is the most pious' has annihilated once and for all the self-fashioned standards of superiority and distinction. Nevertheless, you simply feel helplessly miserable when you see that this pre-Islamic prejudice which first manifested itself as as Qarshi, Talibi, Abbasi etc. became an effective tool for capturing caliphate and leadership. So much so, that the Fatimid claimants to caliphate declared the descendants of Fatima (Aal-e-Fatima) to be exceptionally higher in rank and distinction to other members of the Prophet's household (ahl-e-bait). Lady Fatima, her husband

Ali, and both Fatimi sons Hasan and Husain constituted a spiritual family, known as the holy pentacorpus, believed to be an extension of the Prophet of God. This holy pentacorpus is held as sacred now as the heavenly family of the Trinity for Christians.

In this land of ours there are a number of syed families that trace their bloodline to the Prophet of God and with this appellation they have, thus, contributed towards the perpetuation and strengthening of priesthood in Islam. Nevertheless, the truth of the matter is that this claim of theirs enjoys legitimacy in no respect whatsoever – historically, rationally or even in the divine revelation. Like among other people, with Arabs as well symbols of racial superiority existed. And why isolate Arabs? – all those overlords in the human history who enslaved people in virtue of dynastic or priestly preeminence, have always introduced themselves as the closest descendants of the heavenly families. When the issue of caliphate was approached in terms of familial proximity rather than piety and competence, the question acquired significance as to who was the most deserving candidate for the Prophet's legacy. The problem, however, was that the Prophet had not left behind male issue. The Qur'anic verse: 'Muhammad is certainly not a father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets' clinches the fact in absolute and decisive terms that he did not leave behind a line of descendants. His real significance therefore is not that of a progenitor since he is not the father of a man to survive him for perpetuating his dynasty. But his real status is that of the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets. Historical sources are in total agreement on the fact that those people around the world who want to be identified as *saadaat* (syeds) may be Hashimite or Muttalibi by origin, their bloodline may be traced to the households of Abu Talib, Abu Lahab, Abbas or Hamza, but not to Muhammad the Messenger of God.

It is necessary to understand how and when the way was paved for the sneaking of racial ascendancy into Islam. Of the four jurist imams of Sunni Islam, Shafei is the one who claimed Quraishi ancestry. In his travelogue, he openly expressed his superiority in this respect. But then, mere Quraishi reference did not amount to direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad bin Hanafiah led an uprising which gained public support even though he was a non-Fatimid son of Ali. That his call should succeed in attracting people without a Fatimid linkage clearly points to the fact that the pentacorpus theory or the claim to be in the bloodline of the Prophet is a latter-day fiction; clearly it is a result of the clandestine propaganda of the Isma'elite missionaries. In the Isma'elite sources, Hazrat Fatima is a figure of superhuman rather mythological proportions. This conception of her unavoidably influenced the other Shia factions as well. She is considered '*batool*' meaning virgin even after having given

birth to Hasan, Husain and Muhsin. The belief is common that the sperm used in the creation of imams has nothing to do with the ordinary process or stages of human reproduction. Isma'ilites also believe that Abu Talib was the *mustawda* (repository) of the Prophet. So when Ali reached puberty, the imamate got transferred through him to his descendants. From this particular angle in the Isma'elite heavenly system Hassan and Husain can be seen directly related to that heavenly family of imams. The incessant covert propaganda of this dogma gradually installed this fictional heavenly family of Hazrat Fatima and the holy pentacorpus at the very heart of Islam. Thus far, all claims to dynasty used to be based on lineage through the male heir; but now, owing to mythological image of Fatima, a new tradition was forged, against all established norms, to trace bloodline through mother rather than through father. This was a very unconventional historical fraud tantamount to reopening in the ummah the divinely terminated bloodline of the Prophet, with the clear Qur'anic declaration to this effect. Thus, at the pretext of fraudulent 'syed' lineage, the accursed priesthood tightened its grip on the ummah once again.

It is also beyond one's comprehension as to what grounds the other daughters of the Prophet and their offspring were altogether deprived of the same distinction and honour and what could be the justification for their banishment from the aforesaid fictitious Heavenly Family. His eldest daughter Zainab's son, Ali bin Abul Aas, rode the Prophet's camel as she walked into Makkah on the day of its conquest, and was martyred later in the battle of Yarmuk. The other two daughters of the Prophet, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum, who died in Madina, actively supported their father at every step in his mission. But why did the political propagandists not consider them worthy of the same honour and distinction? Their offspring too was allowed to vanish into the pages of history like a number of other Muslims of Quraish descent. If the Isma'ilites had not exploited the appellation of Lady Fatima as a stepping stone in their political adventurism, the concept of the holy pentacorpus would not have been created, nor the army of those had come into existence who proudly claim to be 'syeds' with concocted lineage to the Prophet. It is also equally interesting to note that the social expression of syeds' superiority was formally employed first during the reign of Aal-e-Buwaih when the term 'shareef' [i.e. a man of distinction] became popular for syeds. The honorific 'shareef' prefixed to the names of Shareef Razi and Shareef Murtaza bears the same imaginary 'distinction.' In the days to come everything bearing any link with syeds, even their places of birth or residence, were branded 'shareef,' even though in those places as such there was no iota of 'distinction' or any racial linkage to the Prophet in any sense. As for the syeds of India and Pakistan, it is

historically documented that most of them have descended from Muhammad Al-Kabuli who, instead of being Hasani and Husaini, was a descendant of Muhammad bin Hanafia, that is, non-Fatimid offspring of Hazrat Ali. In order to save his life Muhammad Al-Kabuli took refuge in Kabul where he married the daughter of a non-Muslim ruler of Kabul. In the light of history and *wahi* and reason there is no more truth than this in the claims of the bloodline linkage to the Prophet. As for the various Sufis who surfaced in India in their times as camouflaged Isma'elite missionaries, they enjoyed simply the status of missionaries who had been assigned the task of propagation. They were not related to the family of imams as such. This is very much acknowledged even today by the supreme Da'i or missionary of the factions of Daudi Bohra community. Fatimid missionaries played a key role also in spreading inflated views regarding the progeny of Hazrat Fatima. Ibn Arabi is one such figure whose notions have cast shadows over orthodox Sunni Muslim thought. He forcefully advocated the idea in his *Futuh-at-e-Makkiya* that the promise that God has made to the Prophet for forgiving all his earlier and later sins is inclusive of Fatima's progeny as well as all her descendants to follow until Doomsday. Such traditions that promise even the gravest of sins are washed off on account of one's gentle and kind treatment of Fatima's progeny are not rare among Muslims. Ibn Arabi's lyric of Isma'elite origin is extremely widely popular even among the Sunni Muslims - it says:

لى خمسة اطفى بها حرالوباء الحاطمة  
المصطفى والمرضى وابناهما والفاطمة

(I have Five whose blessings cool down the heat of even the worst of plagues; Mustafa, Murtaza, their two sons and Fatima.)

From this it is easy to conceive how the declaration to the effect that the bloodline of the Prophet was terminated, backed up by unequivocal Qur'anic authority, was so cunningly circumvented by the covert propaganda of the Fatimids. Thus, the freedom of thought granted and advocated by Islam was stifled by the invented racial priesthood.

### THE SECTARIAN CASTING OF THE SUNNAH

The various Muslim sects, that maintain separate theoretical and ideological identities, possess separate anthologies of the Prophet's sunnah. Books of one sect are not reliable for the other sects, irrespective of the presence of the Prophet's traditions in them. Shias hold on to the Sunni books as long as those books appear to support their sectarian stance. On the other side, Sunnis consider Shia books totally unreliable. Each sect insists that the collections of the Prophet's sunnah that they possess are the only authentic ones. This situation has generated sects locked in eternal discord such as

Shia, Sunni, Isma'elite, Ibadi and many other sub-sects besides. Since this sectarianism has been flourishing in the name of sunnah itself, it is not easy therefore to demolish their foundations. One wonders why these 'sunnah lovers' fail to understand that it is our duty to submit to a hadith of the Prophet preserved by whatever group. How on earth, therefore, can we reject a tradition simply because it is found in books possessed by a sect other than our own. If sunnah is found only in books of a particular sect, as is commonly held, then all sects in the ummah are hadith rejecters at one level or another in the sense that they refuse to abide by the hadith found in books other than those of their own respective sects. An ordinary Muslim is fed up of sectarianism and anxiously desires the unity of ummah. When he finds that sectarianism among Muslims flourishes with reference to faith and sunnah, he feels totally frustrated. He then immediately infers that if it is really a matter rooted in faith and if reports preserved in those hadith books are really the pronouncements of the Prophet, there is no chance whatsoever for these different sects to be united even until the end of the world. He also feels that no power in the world could ever impose a halt on the process of ongoing disintegration and compartmentalization that started in the fourth century.

Is the ideological chaos then, as well as unending mutual strife among different sects, what the future holds in stock for the ummah? Can this ummah never be transformed into a single indivisible entity once again? This is the situation that our thinkers have lamented for centuries. Nevertheless, the sects that found religious bases for their ideological chaos found themselves lost in a blind alley with no way out, and they gave in to this painful situation. It is commonly believed now that we have to live with our mutual contradictions and conflicts embodied in our sectarianism, since reconstructing the defragmented corpus of the ummah into a solidified unity is neither feasible nor practicable. It leads to the inevitable consequence that our graph has been showing a steep drop with every passing day. Each rescue plan is defeated by internal differences and mutual hatred, and conspiracies are hatched to see the other bite the dust.

In order to disentangle ourselves from this painful situation, it is necessary for us to comprehend the historical process that generated the popular concept of sunnah and which, instead of unifying and strengthening it, split the ummah into mutually warring groups. We have to comprehend the point that the popular concept of sunnah and its Shia and Sunni versions are products of a particular social and political phase. It all sprang up when Muslims indulged in civil wars and political factionalism; when three caliphates emerged simultaneously in the Islamic world; and when the fall of the Abbasid regime provided environment conducive to the rise of Aal-e-Buwaih, the rule

of the Saljuks, and the priesthood of ulama and Sufis. But before going further, let us consider a few important questions.

Regarding sunnah two different traditions exist among Sunnis and Shias, on account of which they have parted ways. According to the Sunni hadith, the Messenger of God said, 'I am leaving behind two things which if you hold fast you will not go astray and that is God's Book and my Practice (sunnah)'. Shias say that by these two things he means God's Book and ahl-e-bait (members of his household). Did you notice that there is no difference whatsoever between the two sects, as both believe holding onto the Qur'an to be the Prophet's commandment? The difference however is about the other thing he mentioned: sunnah or *itrah* [ahl-e-bait]. This is the delicate matter responsible for dividing Muslims into two groups, and so it requires cool-minded contemplation. In order to get to grips with the matter, both groups may be asked as to what the Prophet actually meant by his commandment to hold fast unto his sunnah or *itrah*? Mention of the Book of God (*Kitabullah*) immediately projects on the screen of our mind a particular book called the 'Qur'an.' But, if by the sunnah we mean the six canonical books of hadith popular as *Sehah Sitta* among Sunnis, or the authentic source of *itrah* such as the writings of Kulaini, Ibn Babwaih, Istibsar Tusi and Nahj-ul-Balaghah, the Muslims of the Prophet's time were totally unaware of any such books. All these hadith books came into existence in the third and fourth centuries after hijra. Which collections did they consult then in their search for sunnah or *itrah*, that is the question. The books that we believe now to be the infallible source of sunnah or *itrah* and on which rests the sacrosanct edifice of religious factionalism had yet to come into existence then. How far is the claim justified then that the sunnah thrives in *Sehah Sittah* or *itrah* implies the four hadith books of Shias? It is also worth pondering that when the anthologies of sunnah and *itrah* were non-existent, what did the Muslims of the early period understand by these terms? Aside from the authenticity of this hadith, their mind would certainly not have gone to *Sehah Sittah* for sunnah, nor would have the Four Books of Shias glimmered in their eyes for *itrah*. The fact is that the ahl-e-bait concept had yet to grow and fructify. Muslims of the early period had no inkling of the names of the twelve imams, their traditions and commandments, nor did they think of consulting the so-called 'most authentic book after the Book of God.' We can understand therefore that whatever was meant by sunnah or *itrah* around that time, it didn't include a hint at those six or four latter-day hadith collections.

Now consider this delicate and sensitive issue from another angle! If sunnah or *itrah* had really been as important as the Qur'an, why did the Prophet not leave behind such an authentic collection for guidance purposes as he did with the Qur'an? Had this

happened, the very religious foundations of the rise of the sharpest differences and deep mutual hatred would not have existed at all. Who else can understand the point better than God and His Prophet that there is strength in unity and absolute loss in disunity? The Qur'an commands us to hold fast unto the rope of God and never to fall into disarray. It warns that if you Muslims take to the path of dispute and disunity, you will lose heart in the face of your enemy. As for those who fell into sectarianism and got split into groups, the Qur'an is clear about them too saying that they lost their faith and the Prophet has nothing to do with them [لَسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ]. How is it possible therefore that the Prophet who took extreme care about committing the Qur'an to both memory and writing and took every possible step to leave it behind in the form of a complete book in its appropriate and final shape, would do absolutely nothing about the preservation of the so-called other source? Not only that, but his most revered companions as well as their successors would always eschew the thought of collecting his 'sayings' and compiling and publishing them in the form of a well-defined document. We should also realize that all these hadith collections even put together, compiled by the third and fourth century hadith scholars, despite their claims to authenticity and accuracy, do not encompass all the twenty three years of the Prophet's life in their entirety. Nor have the compilers claimed that their collections present a comprehensive record of each and every word and deed of the Prophet. So, should we be justified in thinking therefore that today's ummah is not really in possession of a complete record of the Prophet's life encompassing all his sayings and all other major and minor details of his twenty-three year long Prophetic life? If this is true, where should those people look for the complete sunnah who believe in holding fast to the sunnah? Similar is the difficulty of the *itrah* believers. Different Muslim sects harbour different concepts of ahl-e-bait. For some ahl-e-bait is confined to the holy pentacorpus. Some see it embodied in the form of twelve or seven imams. For some this chain continues to date. According to some interpretations, Aal-e-Abbas too are included in ahl-e-bait on account of *hadith-e-kisa*. Some believe that the holy wives of the Prophet are also included, and for some others the whole ummah is included in his descendants in their capacity as the bearers of his mission. So *itrah* too is as ambiguous and vague a concept as sunnah whose dimensions are simply impossible to determine.

This difference between sunnah and *itrah* and these conflicting interpretations of *uswah-e-Rasool* (the Prophet's beautiful pattern of conduct) have kept the ummah fractured for about a thousand years. Its early features took shape, as hinted above, around the third and fourth centuries. However, it took many centuries for them to acquire the air of sanctity and authenticity that they enjoy today. After so many

centuries the concept became so popular that the information about the Prophet's words and deeds gathered in these human compilations is not admissible to any doubt. Any thought of its critical reevaluation would amount not only to shaking the foundations of our sect but also to losing our faith for relinquishing sunnah. The first thing to understand here is the fact that the term 'sunnah' in the sense of '*sunnat-e-Rasool*' is not a Qur'anic term. Though in the Qur'an we find terms such as '*sunnat-e-Ibrahim*' (Abraham's practice) and '*sunnatullah*' (God's Practice), we do not find anywhere a term like '*sunnat-e-Rasool*.' Nevertheless, it has been enjoined upon Muslims to find in the Prophet's person the 'most beautiful pattern of conduct' (*uswah-e-hasanah*) that serves them best for beautifying their own conduct. There can be no doubt about the fact that for us Muslims the personality of the Prophet is worth emulating in all its dimensions. We cannot even imagine hesitating in any measure in our obedience once we have known the Prophet's instruction, since such an attitude would be just fatal to our faith. Nevertheless, our love of the Prophet demands that we should be extremely careful about first ascertaining the genuineness of the reported hadith in terms of both content and reporter. We should first make sure that what is reported to us in his name is really a saying of the Prophet. We should never allow it to be so that what we believe as the Prophet's saying is doubtful in the first place. If this happens, it would amount to slandering the Prophet in that it would attribute to him someone else's lie, fraud and falsehood about which the Prophet has clearly said: 'One who deliberately lies in my behalf would for sure find his place in the (hell-)fire.'

All these hadith anthologies are a product of human endeavor. They cannot claim therefore total reliability or authenticity and absolute genuineness. This is because their collection or compilation is based on human reasoning and human insight. In hadith scrutiny human criteria have been employed. And this is what has caused differences among hadith experts on the issue of reporting and reporters of hadith. There is no reason, therefore, that the compiled Sunni or Shia accounts of the Prophet's day, as well as of the subsequent period, should be accorded the status of sanctity or finality in their respective circles. Be it Bukhari or Muslim, Kulaini or Ibn Babwaih, none of them had been assigned by God to the task of collecting and compiling sunnah. Nor has God commanded us to believe in those human academic endeavours the way we believe in the heavenly scriptures. These books have not been recommended or endorsed by God. What is the need then of embracing them as an integral part of religion? If these human endeavours of hadith collection and compilation had really been accomplished as a part of a divine plan, and if these books had really been a manifestation of revelation (*wahi*), the reports they carry would certainly not have been



marked by insurmountable mutual conflict as well as clear contradictions. The Qur'anic verse applies to these compilations as well which says: 'Had it (Qur'an) been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy.' Much discrepancy in the hadith corpus is indicative of the fact that its source is decisively other than divine, otherwise it would have been as discrepancy-free as the Book of God.

Sunnah is an ongoing process. In every society some traditions gather strength with reference to the concepts of commendable and condemnable (*ma'roof* and *munkar*). However, in altered circumstances and in a different time and place the need arises to reevaluate those traditions. Contrary to sunnah, the *uswah* or 'pattern' points to that eternal and infallible message in whose goals and purpose no change can ever occur. Sunnah rather refers to the outward form of a practice, whereas *uswah* or 'pattern' to the structure lying at the core of the action prompting the latter to manifest itself as a seemly response to the given situation. Whereas the outward form is liable to change in due course of time, the underlying structure is not in virtue of its eternal and universal value. Muslims of the early period displayed a creative and ingenious attitude towards the Prophetic sunnah. Hazrat Omer, for instance, tried to capture and maintain the spirit of justice in the case of conquered lands instead of imitating the Prophet's apparent action. Regarding 'heart-winning steps' (مؤلفة القلوب), too, he took a stance different from that of the Prophet. He also suspended the hand-chopping sentence during the famine. When he took those steps, he probably thought that in the changed circumstances those steps were much closer to the spirit of justice that was the soul of the Prophet's action. So if sunnah is the name of the Prophetic precedents and if it implies the practical initiatives of the Prophet, it is then an ever evolving process, whose visible form is liable to vary with the changing circumstances or in a different time and space. Who can be a greater follower of the Prophet's sunnah than his most revered companions? But then sunnah was not a frozen object; it was rather an ongoing and evolving process as indicated above. The eyes of the Prophet's companions were firmly fixed on the unvarying spirit of sunnah rather than on its momentary manifestations. To differ from its precedents, therefore, did not amount for them to its neglect or disdain. Nor did anyone dare then to deride them as hadith rejecters (*munkir-e-hadith*).

For their extraordinary love and affection of the Prophet, Muslims, right from the first, took a keen interest in preserving the details of his life and time. There is nothing objectionable about the practice that our beloved Prophet's life and time are recounted in our gatherings and the holy memoirs of those blessed days are allowed to enrich and bless our lives. That was what drove people in hordes to the lectures of hadith scholars. As the companions of the Prophet departed from this world one by one, the need was

felt more than ever before to collect and compile the chronicles of those holy and blessed days. Although some people kept their own personal collections, none dared initiating the formal compilation and publication of hadith privately or officially. And this was in submission to the Prophet's injunction, as reported in the Muslims, 'Don't write anything from me except the Qur'an. And one who has written anything from me other than the Qur'an must erase it.' In the times to follow, the collections of Bukhari and Muslim gained popularity for their editing merits and chapter division, and Kulaini's *Usool and Furoo'*, for their projection of a Shia point of view, gained the status of the foundation of the Shia school. But to prepare and publish these compilations was a personal decision of their authors anyway. This decision did not spring from the common agenda of the ummah, nor was it accomplished at the behest of the ruler of the day. During their day, the above collections, like many other collections of the time, were considered just historical accounts of the Prophet's time. They were not considered sacred or of legislative value in nature. Nor did they enjoy the status of the infallible source of sunnah. Had this been the case, Imam Muslim would not have thought of breaking up with the former of his two mentors, Zahili and Bukhari, when they had fallen into a mutual dispute. In his disapproval of him he went to the extent of returning all hadith Zahili he had acquired from him prior to Zahili's dispute with Imam Bukhari. Around that time, such chronicles were considered disputable political perspectives. Their status was that of reports attributed to the Prophet, rather than his utterances in absolute and incontrovertible terms. At places in these books the caliphate was said to be the right of the progeny of Abbas and in some other places it was said to be reserved for Hazrat Fatima's progeny. In some the installation of Ali's imamate at Ghadir Khum was mentioned, and somewhere it was mentioned that Hazrat Omer prevented the Prophet from having his will written down when he so wished on his deathbed. And somewhere it was narrated that Hazrat Abu Bakr and Omer in the absence of Hazrat Ali so hastily concluded the matter of caliphate in favor of the former that the resulting mutual rancor and strife almost presented the spectacle of pre-Islamic jahiliya. At that time, such narratives were considered a coloring of history. Such narratives sneaked into the *Sehah Sitta*, *Musnad Ahmad* and other Sunni hadith collections simply because these books then represented our common cultural heritage. However, when in the fourth century the Abbasid, Fatimid and Twelver sects came into existence, owing to the splitting of Abbasid rule and enjoying at the same time the state patronage, these sects separated their books. Shias accorded their four hadith books the sanctity of faith and dogma rather than reading them as political history. And Sunnis, on the other side, bestowed

upon Shia's discarded hadith collections the sanctified status of *Sehah Sitta*. It is difficult for us to say at the moment who the actual inventor of the term *Sehah Sitta* was or when this term was first used, but we know for sure that even after a lapse of one thousand years ulema have lacked consensus on which collections to include in the holy list of these 'six authentic books' (Sehah). Some opine that *Mu'atta* should be included and some others say Ibn Majah deserves that privilege more. As far as the hyperbolic expression 'the most authentic book after the Book of God' is concerned, some say it applied to the Bukhari and some others think that the Muslim deserves that distinction.

Imam Malik strictly forbade, during the reign of Mansoor, to bestow on his book *Mu'atta* the juristic and legislative status. He realized that a product of human academic endeavor, however astutely compiled, may not be elevated to the level of sharia source. There is no justification therefore that what Imam Malik was hesitant about, despite his proximity in time and space to the Prophet's era, should be licensed for the latter-day compilers much removed in time and space from him.

### NEO-FACTIONALISM

If the splitting and enfeeblement of the Abbasid caliphate caused the strengthening of the factions like Shia, Sunni, Isma'elite, Ibadi etc., and if the temporary acquiescent political steps of that era accorded permanence and sanctity to the camps of the four imams, the vociferous movements that appeared in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in the twentieth century for filling the political gap caused some new camps to pop up into existence. Just as our predecessors committed the mistake of colouring the political difference with religious dogma as a result of which one ummah got split into many ummats, exactly the same mistake is committed by these twentieth century movements in their reformist zeal. Ikhwanul Muslimoon of Hasan al-Banna, Tablighi Movement of Maulana Ilyas, and Maulana Abul Ala Maududi's Jama'at-e-Islami, that rose initially for the revival of the whole Islamic system with the purpose of recharging the ummah with faith and sincerity and organizing it for Islam's real mission, soon were seized by group psychology. So far the Muslims indulged in Shia-Sunni like factionalism or had their social life shredded by conflicting juristic sectarianism and by claimants to spiritual caliphate. Now, instead of consolidating the unity and solidarity of the ummah, these new movements became a source of spitting out still new camps. The founders of these movements initially faced severe public antagonism though. Just as a crowded train passenger expresses reservations and meanness towards every new passenger, almost the same treatment

was meted out initially to these movements. For instance, during the heyday of Jami'atul Ulama and the Muslim League, the attitude of both the ulema of the ummah and the masses was of total rejection towards Jama'at-e-Islami. But, as the Jama'at gradually strengthened its camp, Abul Ala Maududi's movement also came to be regarded a part of the mainstream Muslim ummah. The services of the twentieth-century movements that rose in the name of revival and reform are certainly commendable. Nevertheless, the survival of the scum of these movements, even after they have exhausted their role, in the form of persisting ideological groups is without doubt not a good omen. As long as these movements were considered an instant response to the given situation, they posed no threat to the unity of ummah. But, when they turned later into permanent ideological groups inspired by the writings of their founders and started giving off the hue of a cult rather than that of provisional movements, only then one realized the severity of the crisis. Now, it is not easy to haul all these parties to unity or consensus as they possess different interpretations of religion and different plans for the ummah. Each party adheres to an alternative system of leadership and caliphate where the ameer demands allegiance from his followers as if he were the real caliph of the time. Besides, lately some such persons have also jumped into the foray who have been trying to establish a new ideological identity with reference to religious interpretation under the labels such as Minhaj International, Al-Risala Mission or Qur'anites. It is not hard to decipher in all these efforts that in the name of revivalism and propagation all these different groups have only contributed towards streamlining and strengthening the group identity rather than seeking collective unity. Now these group identities appear to be cults much more than movements. So, the ummah which was already facing Shia-Sunni factionalism and which has been bleeding for centuries from the wounds inflicted on it by the mutual conflicts of Shafeis and Hanefis, has further been pushed into chaos as it has to face now also Tablighi, Jama'ati, Salafi, Jami'atul Ulamai, Deobandi, Bareilvi, Qadiani and many other similar internal distractions and dissuasions. The problem is that from the womb of these identities newer identities are taking birth incessantly. When a jama'at splits into two factions, or when the internal turmoil leads a madrassa to be broken up as did Darul Uloom and Darul Uloom Waqf, the ordinary Muslims remain at a loss to understand which of the two is just. Whether it is Darul Uloom Deoband or Mazahirul Uloom, Jami'atul Ulama or Salafi Movement, this division within division causes great anxiety as well as confusion to ordinary Muslims. In their minds therefore the question rises with full force whether chaos, dissent and disunity are essential features of Islam and its followers. What could be the ultimate reason why the organizations and

madradas of the holy ulema, who day and night enjoin the need of unity upon the ummah, are all torn apart among themselves and their disputes are pending in the government law courts? Our pastime in the name of religion has thrown us into unending mess, on account of which persuading different parties and sects to attain unity and consensus on the divine mission has become impossible. Where will this situation drive us eventually?

There is a dead end ahead. The thousand-year journey of sectarian Islam has driven us into a blind alley from which there appears no ready escape. All the efforts made so far towards undoing this chaos and disarray have been overshadowed by the same sectarian approach and juristic methodology which are actually responsible for churning out those problems in the first place. In our view, the strategy that engendered problems in the first place cannot and should not be further resorted to for the redemption of the situation created by it. We need to make a new beginning in fact. But the problem is that the upholders of traditional Islam and those scholars who accord the sanctity of faith and religion to our ideological, intellectual and historical incidents are apprehensive of a new beginning. They are suspicious of any real corrective measures in the direction of reformation lest it should raze the edifice of historical Islam to the ground.

آئین نو سے ڈرنا طرز کہن پہ اڑنا  
منزل یہی کٹھن ہے قوموں کی زندگی میں

‘To be wary of the new mode and adhere to the old way/ This is a really hard juncture in the life of nations.’ Iqbal.

Our ideological and intellectual deviation initially started with political differences. But during the third and fourth centuries it got a chance to fructify and flourish, a situation which continued down the centuries until the collective structure of the ummah tumbled down under the load of its own internal disorder. The internal conflicts were much more operative than the external factors in the downfall of the Umayyad, Fatimid, and Abbasid regimes. The fall of the Mughal, Safawid, and Ottoman regimes also offers us the same lesson: that no one can subdue Muslims but Muslims. Even today the greatest threat to the possibility of a united Islamic world and its renaissance emerges from within. Look around with open eyes and the point will become crystal-clear. Just recall that not too long ago in Afghan Jihad the great courage of Muslims and their extraordinary sacrifices resulted in the defeat of the largest army of the world. But when the time came to construct a new system, every racial, tribal, juristic, and other group prejudices resurfaced leading to mutual bloodshed. Taliban’s

fiqhi Islam turned out to be a torture-house for other sects. Pakistan had been formed as a laboratory of Islam and in her formation not only millions of lives were sacrificed but Islam's past, present and future in the subcontinent as well. In the same Pakistan we have not achieved a consensus so far as to which Islam deserves to be made the official religion; that is, which sect and which school of jurisprudence should prevail. This persisting situation of 'every faction is happy with what it has got' [كُلُّ حَزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ] [فَرِحُونَ] ultimately paved the way for secular democracy. As the politics of 'religion' meaning 'sectarian faith' gradually intensified, for each group of the ummah it became difficult to tolerate the other groups. In the Middle-East the Shia-Sunni hatred has been constantly on the rise under state patronage. No one knows when this lava could erupt and engulf, God forbid, this central part of the Islamic world. This is the situation that faces us today. This is what we have inherited as the logical consequence of our millennium-old aberration. The situation, which is really critical, cannot be contained by mere traditional tactics.

#### SO, WHAT TO DO?

A new world of possibilities may open up for us if, and only if, we are able to realize that these factional versions of Islam which have kept us divided and immersed in ideological chaos and mutual strife and which we have falsely believed to be the actual religion has nothing to do with the real message of the Prophet Muhammad. But all this is a residue of the days of our turbulent history. Our disintegration and mutual conflicts are not desirable in the eyes of God nor do they reflect the teachings of the Prophet. The character of the Prophet, which embodies for Muslims the 'most beautiful behavioral pattern' (*uswah-e-hasanah*) cannot be blamed for the self-tailored invocations such as Shia, Sunni, Hanefi, Maliki, Salafi, Zahiri and so on. This point will be easy for us to appreciate if we are familiar with the historical fact that the Shia, Sunni, or Isma'ili camps took a formal shape only in the fourth century of Islam. The Abbasid caliphate, which became the advocate of Sunni Islam only after the ideological splitting of imamate, initially emerged as an ahl-e-bait movement and with the same reference the spokespersons of Aal-e-Abbas got a chance to consolidate their rule. If the Fatimids had not occupied Egypt and the rule of Aal-e-Buwaih had not been consolidated under the very aegis of the Abbasid caliphate, through the political fallout of its enfeeblement the separate identities of Shia-Sunni and Isma'ilite would not have been formed. Hence, Ibadis, too, would not have got a chance to introduce themselves as *ahl-ul-adl wa al-istiqamah* (people of justice and firmness). Our being Sunni or Shia, therefore, is not God-ordained, but it is just a leftover of a historical occurrence. The

same is the case for our factional identity, which was not chosen for us by God nor did the Prophet instruct us to follow four or eight imams. Abu Hanifa, Malik and Shafei were academically active in the second century hijri, but around the same time and for long afterwards dozens of scholars of similar stature are on record as being active throughout the then Islamic world. There is a whole galaxy of names such as Sufian Thawri, Awza'i, Ibn Rahwaih, and Jarir Tabari etc. If King Baibars had not appointed four different jurists to operate simultaneously (representing four schools of fiqh respectively) with a view to circumventing juristic tussle and rivalry and later, and in the same vein, if King Barquq had not established four separate prayer areas in the ka'aba mosque, Sunni Islam today would have been unaware of the term 'four imams' (*a'imma arba'ah*). Just as we do not find anything missing today in the religion of Islam because of the disappearance of the juristic schools of Sorry, Awza'i, and Tabari, even without the 'four imams' our religious life would have been quite normal and active. Ibn Hanbal, who coined the concept of 'four caliphs' during the reign of Mutawakkil to counter which the term 'caliph sans break' (خليفة بلا فصل) became a Shia catchphrase, was not regarded as a jurist or faqih either during his own time or for a long afterwards. Prior to the emergence of the Fatimids on the scene, the Friday sermon used to be an expression of political stance rather than one of religious faith. The Fatimids incorporated the concept of pentacorpus superiority (*tafzil-e-panjtan*) into the Friday sermon, which the Abbasids, with their own claims to caliphate, adopted so they could be regarded as the true representatives of mainstream Islam.

The term 'religious sciences' (*uloom-e-shar'ia*), which has played an important role in popularizing the un-Qur'anic concept of the dualism of religious and secular sciences, is simply nonexistent in the Qur'an and hadith. Abu Abdullah Alkatib Al-Khwarizmi (d.378 AH) was first to use the term *uloom-e-shar'ia* which in the days to come created an exclusivist circle of the inheritors of the Prophetic sciences. These Islamic madrasas, divided as they stand in the name of Islam and which we believe today to be the castles of Sunni or Shia Islam, came into being in the first place owing to the political rivalry between and immediate expediencies of the Fatimids and Abbasids. To perpetuate their remnants or to see them as castles of Islam is purely a result of sheer ignorance of history.

The special costumes of the ulema which completely set their wearers apart from common humans rather as aliens from outer space, had no trace in the Prophet's or his companions' time. If Qazi Abu Yusuf had not popularized a ceremonial costume for judges, this spectacle of an ulema outfit, different as it is from the dress of common Muslims, would have been unheard of in Muslim society. The historical accounts that

keep Shias and Sunnis split into permanent sects and as a result of which mutual alienation, rather aversion, has assumed the level of faith, are found in those history books which were all compiled in the third or fourth centuries. If different sects had not accorded to these narratives juristic and interpretative status, these compilations too would have vanished into the pages of history just like many other compilations extinct now. Or, if the opponents had laid hand on them and destroyed them at the time of the fall of Baghdad or Castle of Alamut, our historical perception today would have been completely different.

If rival claimants to caliphate had not inaugurated spiritual caliphates and successive chains thereof in the garb of Sufism and if Fatimid missionaries had not dispatched the missions of their determined callers to Khurasan, Multan, Delhi, and Ajmer, the terms such as *piri-muridi* and *bay'at-o-khilat* (allegiance and holy garb) would have been unheard of. Nor would the simpletons among Muslims have felt any need to be associated with *khanqahs* and Sufi lodges. The transformation of the remnants of *jama'ats* and movements into cults is a recent phenomenon beginning when, owing to a general despair resulting from the absence of caliphate, we started to think that the global unity of Islam is an impracticable notion and so we have to be content with the same petty emirates and caliphates. An 'active participation in virtuous deeds' [فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ] or charitable works is a part of our faith. Nevertheless, to breathe in a cult-like atmosphere and within the same establishing spiritual emirate or caliphate, and to obligate obedience to the cult leader as if he were the real *amir-ul-mu'minin*, and above all the process of perpetuating such cults, are all things thrown up by our turbulent history. Having no way out, we can only tolerate them for the time being, but we cannot produce evidence to validate them from the Qur'an and sunnah.

If only, one wishes, we had realized that God only sent His Book and His Prophet. And during the very lifetime of the Prophet the religion of Islam had been perfected. Whatever follows is only the history of the believers in which we can observe the high moments of glory as well as the low occasions of flaws. If we read the post-Prophet narratives as only history, it may prove for us a great source for learning lessons and prevent us from repeating the same mistakes in the future. But, if we attribute to those tragic accidents of history any sanctity or juristic value, the rope of God will surely slip from our hands.

#### UNITED ISLAM: POSSIBILITIES AND APPREHENSIONS

For the last one thousand years we have adhered to the received Islam and absorbed different concepts emerging in different periods of our history. In such a



situation the apprehension is quite natural that if the popular religiosity is rolled back, what would happen then to the faith of *fiqhi* Muslims? It is generally said that without jurists and traditionists (*fuqaha* and *muhaddisin*) it would become difficult to perform salah, fasting, hajj, zakat etc. The delusion is common that as long as exegetes (*mufassirin*) do not inform us on the context of revelation, the meaning of the Qur'an cannot possibly dawn on us. And without the prescriptions of mystics and Sufis our hearts may not be enlightened with the bliss of contemplation and divine brilliance. All this implies that rejecting popular religiosity would amount to rejecting Islam itself. Such apprehensions, in our opinion, are due to flawed understanding of Islam. Just think, how marvelously the communal and religious life stood on firm ground and operated in the most perfect way prior to the appearance of those jurists and traditionists and exegetes! Differences on interpretative matters and differences of opinion on policy matters were found even then, but despite that the united corpus of the ummah was intact. It was so because the Qur'an held central reference value in the absence of the Prophet. At that time the debates around *makrooh* and *mubah* (detestable and tolerable) had not raised their head, nor was it possible for anyone to put a question mark on a continuous practice (i.e. the established Prophetic deed) by pointing out an oral or single-narrator hadith. At that time, the Book of God was believed to be crystal-clear, manifest, indisputable and self-evident. None doubted even in his wildest thoughts that God had left something lacking in it or a certain point had been left unclear or hazy which it was his duty to clarify or elaborate upon. The Prophet had established a society of selfless people whose mission it was to treat the Qur'an as the trailblazer in every phase of their future history. That is, the Book of God and the invigorating pattern of the Prophet had become a living and creative construct in whose presence Muslims would not miss Islamic versions of rabbinism, papalism, or punditva. Those who could get rid of jurists' schism would still experience the same vastness and revitalizing freshness in Islam as one feels at the advent of a new prophet or at the rollback of solidified ritualism. One might not be sure whether the obligatory acts in ablution (*wuzu*) are four or six or seven; or what its mandatories and optionals (*sunnah* and *nawafil*) are; or how important is raising hands in the prayer; or how important is reciting *fatihah* behind an imam or saying *amin* aloud. Nonetheless, he would face no difficulty in performing ablution or offering salah. This is simply because the practice established by the Prophet has been passed on from one generation to the next in such a way that we find ourselves today as a link in a whole, unbroken sequence. Differences are nothing but a product of jurists' hairsplitting or fallout from contradictory reports of the hadith transmitters. Just think, how many of

us actually possess the knowledge of mandatories or optionals of ablution, nevertheless our prayers are continuing. Tedious and labyrinthine juristic hairsplitting in the name of Islam and massive volumes generated thereof have, to be honest, nothing to do with the active practical life of a Muslim, though for juristic disputation and unnecessary contentions they may carry a lot of significance. It is important to stress that, after all, we are not calling for annihilating these voluminous compilations, but we are certainly in favor of removing them from the high status of sharia sources, so that once again the central and pivotal position of the Qur'an may be restored in Muslim society.

Remember, in the Prophet's absence the Qur'an is the single document that stays beyond all suspicions and enjoys the consensus and confidence of all the believers, at least theoretically, as their common manifesto. Where else, if not here, can you find a better description of the Prophet's mission, its priorities, and its ultimate purposes and goals? We also believe that this infallible source of revelation must offer right guidance to the people of the world until the very end. How callous is it then that this brilliant book be declared null and void by the guesswork of 'abrogator and abrogated,' 'specific and common' or 'revelatory context.' Or, that the commandments of the Qur'an should be isolated by jurists for the purposes of their pedantic quibbling, and a large number of verses exhorting on exploration, invention, use of reason and lesson-learning be relegated to the purpose of mere recitation.

We expect that this call to turn to the Qur'an as The Trailblazer will bring it back once again to our study table. If this became possible, not only would the subsidiary sources of Islam lose their juristic relevance, but also the intrusive dualism about knowledge, that has marred Muslim society and hampered the progress of our academic voyage for so long, would be rolled back thus allowing our sciences yet once again to grow rapidly. In other words, the bulky volumes of jurisprudence, traditions and exegesis (hadith and tafsir) would remain with us only as a cultural heritage and academic continuum, but in the active presence of the Qur'an it would not be possible for anyone to present the verdicts of ancient scholars or elucidations and elaborations of exegetes or jurists of the past as final and conclusive. This will bring forth a condition in which no human construal would enjoy the same rank or repute as that of God's 'final verdict' [فَلله الحجة البالغة], and this privilege would be reserved exclusively for the Book of God.

As the subsidiary sources would lose their relevance, the sects resulting and getting their nourishment from them would appear to us vanishing into thin air. No separate version of Islam would then be based on Sunni *Sehah Sittah*, nor would there be any need to bow down to four Shia books. The compilations of the four imams may

still be consulted for their esteemed academic stature, but at the same time, the other interpretive books of Shias, Isma'ilites, Ibadis, and others would also deserve similar attention since these sects shared a common past with us and parted ways with us at a certain moment of history for certain reasons. That is to say, the sectarian tradition based on historical, cultural, and interpretive literature would die its own natural death. So much so, that none would have an excuse to declare themselves a separate band, even in the name of the Qur'an, and adopt a title like 'ahl-e-Qur'an' (people of the Qur'an) in preference to the God-gifted identity, 'Muslim.' If the task of arbitration is placed in the hands of the Qur'an, there will be no room for any factionalism in our belief. Once the sects have vanished, there will be no need either for the workshops of ulema and Islamic clergy. Nobody would feel the need therefore to trace in the books of comparative fiqh the precedents of juristic variations; nor would the act of writing *sharh* (explanations) upon *sharh* of the books of ancient scholars be considered the height of research and scholarship; nor would it be considered necessary to blacken pages upon pages in exploring antecedents of the pronouns. There will be no urge to consult the archaic books of logic and dialectics, even as tools of understanding. Nor would lives be wasted on exploring as to which reporter's integrity is doubtful and which one of them may actually be considered reliable. So there will be a lot for people to do. Above all, the dualism of knowledge that has captivated our minds for centuries and which has resulted in the division of sciences into sharia sciences and modern sciences will be rolled back once and for all. This division has in fact engendered two different types of minds amongst us which are perpetually in mutual conflict. This internal tussle and divisiveness will peter out for good. Every believer will be able to directly profit from the divine revelation to the extent of his capability. In the absence of ulama, jurists, priests and muftis, the seekers of truth will find themselves in a situation defined by the Qur'an as 'Say, God gives you His directive ...' where all juristic hairsplitting and human verdicts lose their relevance in front of God's verdict.

Rest assured, when the pure faith appears before us in its pristine form, the same euphoric and invigorating situation will arise as was experienced by the first generation Muslims. Faith actually implies unconditional submission. Contrary to those who take ritualism for actual faith it may generate just an ossified sort of religiosity. In the Prophet's day, when the final message of Islam was being revealed, there was no dearth of religious ritualism. Makkah was in fact a bastion of religious activities such as prayers, fasting, ka'ba circling (*tawaf*) and pilgrimage; all of which was going on in a pretty systematic, ceremonial and enthusiastic way. But, the Qur'an targeted these religious undertakings for its severe attack, saying:

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ. فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ. وَلَا يَحِضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ. فَوَيْلٌ  
لِّلْمُصَلِّينَ. الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ. الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ. وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ﴾ [107:1-7]

Did you see one who denies religion (in the garb of religion)?

He is the one who repulses the orphan (with harshness)

And encourages not the feeding of the indigent.

So, woe to the worshippers (musalleen, namazis)

Who are neglectful of their prayers,

Those who (want but) to be seen (of men), (indulge in showing off)

But refuse (to supply) (even) neighbourly needs (Ma'un: little acts of charity).

[107:1-7]

When Islam puts on the garb of religion and when the minds of its followers are totally focused on stolid ritualism instead of the actual aims and goals of Islam, a section of such ulema also mushrooms that is ever ready to shape and codify the minutest details of those rituals. This is the backdoor that lets priesthood lodge itself between God and His slaves. Religion is reduced then to the agency of safeguarding the political and economic interests of the clergy. This was exactly the case in the Makkan society prior to the advent of Islam on which we presented above the sharp Qur'anic criticism by way of an example. And this is not the end of it. The rise of the priesthood becomes an obstacle for us in our direct access to the divine revelation. As a result of according sanctity to the personal understanding of certain humans, different sects start streaming into existence.

The Muslim ummah today, owing to centuries-old deviations and digressions, has reached a point, unfortunately, where it has no future ahead without internal reform, let alone rising again as a beacon for the nations of the world. At this juncture of history, when the sun of capitalism is about to set and when the ideological and thought vacuum has caused immense desperation, it is the duty of the bearers of the final message to come forth for the guidance of mankind. Nevertheless, this is not possible as long as we ourselves do not rise above ideological divisiveness and internal conflicts and develop the real sense of the Prophetic vision of the united Islam. Until our own house is in order, how can we undertake the task of guiding others to the right path? The time has come for the custodians of the final revelation to rise yet again before the world for the sake of reorganizing the human caravan and setting its direction and speed right.

# Notes & References

## SECTION II

<sup>1</sup> Some Judaic thinkers use the written and the oral Torah in their extended meanings. According to them, apart from the Pentateuch, in the Old Testament, the chapters on Nebim (Prophets) and Ketubim (Writings) should be considered part of the written Torah, whereas the Oral Torah is said to encompass the entire range of Judaic philosophy and thoughts. Apart from Mishnah and Gemarah, the Midrashim i.e. the Rabbi interpretations and Haggadah, i.e., accounts related to traditions cannot also be separated from it. Moreover, the treasure of interpretative literature that has accumulated in the search for Torah's esoteric meanings is also considered part of the Oral Torah. One outcome of allowing such breadth of range to Torah's meanings and secrets is that any idea can be presented as interpretation of the Divine word as found in Torah, which, in general, means the Torahic worldview and not Torah itself.

<sup>2</sup> 'My fellow brother, it is incumbent on you and me that we rectify our belief according to the Book and the Sunnah in a way that is consistent with the understanding of the Islamic scholars, because our understanding, if it does not agree with the understanding of these august scholars, is not reliable.' (Quoted in, Muhammad Manzoor Nomani, *Tazkirah Imam Rabbani Alfe Saani*, Lucknow, 1970, p. 159.) Unfortunately, this 'ancestor worship' also characterises the thinking of those who are leading the movement for direct access to the Qur'an: 'I am related to the Predecessors; to cut myself off from them would be equal to ruining myself. This is my considered view and I strongly maintain the view that on any issue, differences with the collective view of the Predecessors are extremely dangerous. Feuds begin with these differences.' (Monthly *Meesaq*, Lahore, September, 1984)

<sup>3</sup> The annals of mystics often refer to the Prophet's traditions directly, without mentioning the chain of transmitters. Maybe, they intended to implement the ideal of passing all good things off as the Prophet's traditions. However, this process has presented quite a contrary view of Islam to us. Sometimes, one cannot but wonder at the audacity of these personalities as to how, merely on the basis of their preferences and conjectures, they could recount things of which no one had any knowledge except Allah. A classic example of this audacity is furnished by Moinuddin Ajmeri who recounted a Hadith with reference to his pir, Usman Haruni, as follows:

'Someone had said to the Prophet, – Please give us some idea about the food and clothes of the inhabitants of heaven. The Prophet replied, – I swear by Allah Almighty, the Most Beneficent, who conferred prophethood on me that a man would eat a hundred times and would make love to his mate a similar number of times. Someone ventured to ask, – O Prophet of Allah, when people ate so much, would they not be required to relieve themselves as frequently? He replied, – No. At the time of the call of nature a whiff of wind will escape from their stomach which will be as sweet-smelling as the musk.'

(*Anis Al-Arwah: Malfoozat-e Usman Haruni*, ed. By Moinuddin Ajmeri)

<sup>4</sup> 'Book of Reality', *Mishnah*

<sup>5</sup> 'فانه آخذ من المعدن الذي يأخذ منه الملك الذي يوحى به إلى الرسول'

(Muhiuddin Ibn-e Arabi, *Fusoos Al-Hikam*, Cairo, 1395 H, p. 73)

<sup>6</sup> *Bukhari*, the chapter on Knowledge

<sup>7</sup> We feel that the entire school comprising Qur'anic signs, amulets and charms came up in Islam under the direct impact of Judaism. The notion that the esoteric meaning of the Torah can be accessed if the Aramaic alphabets are arranged in a particular way was fairly widespread. Geometric figures have also hidden powers, provided one knows the art of arranging them. *Sephiroth* (numerical emanations) is, in fact, a description of God's multifarious qualities. As God is neither male nor female, it encompasses both the forms. God is a mighty number wherein all other numbers are hidden. All the numbers between one and ten are there inherent in the creation of Adam, the inhabitant of paradise. According to Kabbalah, the world created before the creation of the heavenly Adam did not last because there was lack of numerical balance in it.

According to its Sufi commentators, the Torah is an embodiment of God's female form that should be understood at four levels of meaning: peshat (literal), remezi (symbolical), derash (allegorical), and sod (mystical). In the Genesis, the description of the creation of the universe is understood by the mystics in such a way as though God has created the world with the help of words. According to this way of thinking, the whole business of creation was conducted with the help of three words: (alif/ air, meem/water, and sheen/fire. In the breathing of human beings and in the veins of the universe, these three letters create their miracles. This view claims that concentration and reflection on these three basic letters establishes the rapport of a human being with his Creator through a spiritual bond. Instead of taking them simply as receptacles of some meaning they should be taken as a tool to merge with the Almighty, to lose one's identity in His identity. The numerical value attached to each Aramaic letter and its magical power led the Jews to the wrong belief that with the help of the magical powers possessed by these letters they would not only be able to come closer to God, but also after knowing the secrets of their power in different combinations, they would themselves be able to simulate God's experience.

Like his predecessor, Rabbi Akiva, Ibrahim Abul Afiya says the following about this spiritual experience:

'After deep concentration and profound reflection on the letters, you would feel as though the hair on your head had stood on their ends... there is vibration in your blood ... and your whole body is shaking ... your limbs are getting numb and ... you would feel as though some external soul has entered your body ... that would strengthen you from inside and that would spread through your veins ... it is like a scented perfume that would envelop you from head to toe.'

(Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, tr. Aryeh Kaplan, Bibliotheque Nationale ms. No. 774, and Jewish Theological Seminary ms. No. 1887, Quoted in Perle Besserman, *The Shambhala Guide to Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*, Massachusetts 1997, p.37)

In the writings of some Jewish mystics, for example, in *Sefer Yetzirah*, the arrangement of the three basic letters, i.e., *alif*, *meem* and *sheen* was reversed. The devotees were told to read these three letters in the reverse order, and while they do so, they should think about their additional qualities in their imagination, for example *sheen*/fire with convulsions, *meem*/water with peace and contentment, and *alif*/air with the silence of Nothingness.

The view is that the creation of the universe came into effect by ten commands from God, as the phrase, 'And God said ...' occurs ten times in the Torah. As these commands were manifested in the form of letters, the mystics tended to believe in the magical powers of letters. They thought that the art of proper arrangement of these letters would link them to God; some even thought that this art might equip them to be co-creators with God.

(See, Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation*, New York, 1985, pp. 74-75)

The Cabbalistic process of understanding the numerical value of letters has special importance in the understanding of the Torah. According to it, this magical or exclusive knowledge of the Torah is meant for the select few. The three known processes of this art are as follows: first, *Gemaria*, where the numerical value of the letters is determined; the second is *Notarikon*, when the first and the last letter of the word are considered important; the third is *Temurah* which is, in fact, related to the special meaning of letters when they are arranged in the form of geometrical figures. In Muslim sources also, the art of attaching numerical value to letters operates more or less in the same way. Some people think that *jafar* is related to Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq though these personalities had nothing to do with this secret art. If we make a comparative study of the historical evolution of the art of numerical value among Muslims and the practice of this art by the Israelites, it becomes clear that all this trickery and sleight of hand had their origin in the aberrations of the Israelites. Even in the case of later scholars like Shah Waliullah and Ashraf Ali Thanavi, one finds recommendations for the yoga-like spiritual exercises or reading the two Qur'anic verses in conjunction with each other, which demonstrate the amazing impact of the rabbi literature on them. This reached them through the writings of old mystics.

We would like to remind you the process of *zikr* that we have described in the chapter on mysticism and urge you to compare the methods of loud and quite mutterings of Allah's name (*zikr-e jali* and *zikr-e khafi*) with the method of meditation propagated by the famous Jewish

mystic of Spain, Ibrahim Abul Afiya, in the thirteenth century. This will underline the great impact of alien methods on the structure of the Sufi method of worship and meditation. According to Abul Afiya, the status of the letters of the Torah is that of a black spark that has been etched on the paper against the white background. The whole Torah can be delineated in a special arrangement of seventy two sacred letters that can be found in the four letters of Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh. Abul Afiya said that these four letters should be brought into action during meditation in the following way:

Take the name of each letter and breathe deeply; do not take breath between two letters. Rather, take as deep a breath as possible and then pause or relax in the next breath, repeat this with every letter. In other words, take two breaths with each letter – one while pronouncing the letter, and the second one for pause and relaxation; and each breath should comprise both breathing in and breathing out. Do not use your lips while pronouncing the word as you breathe in and breathe out. Rather, you should adopt a method whereby the articulation of the letter should be in harmony with exhaling.

(Quoted in Perle Epstein, *Kabbalah: The Way of Jewish Mystic*, p. 96)

In Abul Afiya and other mystics, the method of meditation is, in fact, based on the hypothesis that there are different centres of energy hidden in the human body that can be activated through four sacred letters of Aramaic. Shah Waliullah and other Muslim mystics exhort the devotee to imagine during meditation that the sky is overcast with white clouds, and sparks of heavenly light are raining down from the sky, soaking his whole body. The Islamic scholars and researchers regarded it just as a kind of psychological training. However, in the Jewish world of the twentieth century, when the writings of secular thinkers such as Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Issac Bashevis Singer, Moshe Idel, Franz Kafka have pulled away the veil of magic from the face of Cabbalistic literature, it is no longer difficult for us to understand that the non-Qur'anic methods of observing the Truth prevalent among Muslims were borrowed from Jewish mystic tradition. According to the Jewish mystic Isaac of Akku if the devotee imagines the basic elements like air, fire and mountain in such a way so as to experience Moses' vision of the Truth, he can reach such heights in his meditation when his eyes would see the sky and the earth in a way that their combined entity would seem to him to be a huge void. Now he should imagine a circle in this void, and then go on etching letters from the Torah in it. While doing so, he should feel as though those letters were vividly illuminated against the background of white paper. The devotee would feel that slowly a mist was gradually covering the dazzling letters, making it difficult to distinguish one thing from another. This is the stage of Nothingness where nothing exists besides God. The Jewish scholars and mystics had very close contact with Islamic cultures in the Abbasid Baghdad and Muslim Spain. In the light of this, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Zohari mysticism had its impact on Muslim thinking in this sphere.

<sup>8</sup> We feel that it is reasonable to assume that 'laohe mahfooz' means 'text within covers' because at the time of the Qur'an's revelation the People of the Book did not have Revelations in the form of



a bound text or book. There was no book that could be presented exclusively as the book of Revelations. The Bible, the Holy Book of Christians includes the sayings of Christ and his teachings that were compiled by his companions or disciples later, which was a kind of appendix to the Old Testament. As for the Old Testament, it must be stressed that the Torah is no specific book; rather it encompasses the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) and the entire range of Talmudic writings. The Torah, which literally means laws, was such a loose book from which laws were drawn liberally. Besides Jewish prophets, the views of rabbis and religious leaders had also become part of the manifestation of the Divine Law. According to some traditions, even the Jewish prophets showed greater reverence for the laws of rabbis than for the law of God. (See, Ezekiel 7:26, and Malachi 2:7). Although one comes across some subdued resistance against the laws of rabbis in Isaiah 29:13 and Jeremiah 8:8, when the prophets of the Israelites exhorted their followers to follow the Divine Law, they did not have any specific book or compiled volume in their minds. Malachi, the last text of the Jewish prophets, ends on this appeal: 'O people, follow the laws of Moses'; however, there is no indication as to where these laws are to be found. As for the Pentateuch, the Jewish researchers themselves are of the opinion, for which there is also internal evidence in it, that all these five books are not simply based on Revelations or Moses' teachings. Thus, for the researcher of Moses' laws it becomes essential to comb the sacred Jewish literature encompassing several centuries, including the Bible and its appendages, and even then it would be difficult to discriminate between genuine Revelations and the sayings and teachings of prophets and rabbis. As opposed to this, the Qur'an has unquestionable precedence over all other revealed books, because here we have the Revelations in their pristine and undiluted form within covers. This is the 'protected tablet', which distinguishes the Qur'an from all other known heavenly texts that are based on oral traditions. This is the Divine Word that was imparted as 'wisdom by pen', i.e., through paper and pen.

<sup>9</sup> *Talmud*, Everyman's Library series, ed. By A. Cohen, p.404

<sup>10</sup> These views of Allama Baghwi have been quoted with approval by Shah Waliullah in his book, *Eqd ul-Jeed*. See, Shah Waliullah, *Eqd ul-Jeed* (translated in Urdu), tr. Maulana Sajidur Rahman Siddiqi, Karachi, 1379 AH, pp. 11-15

*Eqd-ul-Jeed* lays down the conditions for *mujtahid* as follows: *وشرطه انه لا بد له ان يعرف من الكتاب والسنة وما يتعلق بالأحكام ومواقع الإجماع وشرائط القياس وكيفية النظر وعلم العربية والناسخ والمنسوخ وحال الرواة* (pp. 9-10).

<sup>11</sup> 'Kitab Fazail Al-Qur'an', *Fathul Bari*, vol. 8, p. 672, Hadith Number 5010

<sup>12</sup> Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, *Tafseer Surah Al-Kahaf* (Commentary on Surah Al-Kahaf). Also see, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith Number 1766, English translation, p. 386, published by Darul Arabiya, Beirut.

<sup>13</sup> For details, see *Tarjuma Qur'an Al-Majeed*, Introduction by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi, pp. 13-15

<sup>14</sup> The strong resistance put up against direct access to the Revelations by conventional scholars can be gauged to some extent from the following edict issued by one of the venerable institutes of orthodox Muslims:

'This is an acknowledged fact that the task of research and investigation has been completed in the first, second and third centuries (of Islam). This is called Islamic Jurisprudence, which is a collection of the researches by the imams. Hence, by researches on Islam we mean the issues that have been treated in all their depth and complexity and their results are there for all to see. If today's researches agree with them, then their researches are futile, and if they do not agree with them then they are misguided. About this there is consensus in the Muslim community.'

(Fatawa Mufti Jameel Ahmad Thanavi, Jamia Ashrafiya, Lahore, quoted in *Asia*, August 14, 1978.)

<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Yahiel ben Joseph, Quoted by Hyam Maccoby in *Judaism on Trial*.

*Talmud Exposed*, at <http://198.62.75.1/www3/talmud-exposed/talmud/htm>

<sup>16</sup> The tractate 'Fathers' in the *Mishnah*. Also see, 'Chapters of the Fathers' (Pirke 'Abot) tr. Herbert Danby, in the *Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan*. Tr. From the Hebrew by Judah Goldin, Yale Univ. Press, 1955, p.231

<sup>17</sup> Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Al Mustasfa min Ilm Al-Usool*, Egypt, 1356 AH, vol. 2, p. 35

<sup>18</sup> As it is recounted in the Torah: 'And all the people perceived the Thundering and the Lightning and the Voice of the horn and the mountain smoking' (Exodus Zo: 18)

<sup>19</sup> To establish the importance of the rabbi literature vis-à-vis the written Torah they went to the extent of asserting that the sources of all the wisdom and interpretation of the Judaic faith were, in fact, contained in the 'Lightning' and the 'Voice' revealed on Mount Sinai:

'Even what an outstanding disciple was destined to teach in the presence of his master had already been said to Moses on Sinai.' (P. Peah 17a)

Human interpretations created such an impenetrable fence around the Torah that it was perceived much as a sacred but ornamental document which can come to life only if pious elders are reported to have agreed with its intent:

'When the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed himself on Sinai in order to give the Torah the Israel, he delivered it to Moses in this order: the scriptures (the written Torah); the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Haggadah' (which, taken together designate the Oral Torah). (Exodus Rabba 47,1)

<sup>20</sup> The words of the Hadith are as follows: 'عن أسامة بن شريك قال خرجت مع رسول الله حاجا فكان الناس يأتونه فمن قال يا رسول الله! سعيت قبل أن أطوف أو قدمت شيئا أو أخرت شيئا فكان يقول لا حرج إلا على رجل افترض عرض رجل مسلم وهو ظالم فذلك الذي حرج وهلك'

('Kitab Al Manasik', *Mishkat*, vol. 2, Damascus 1961, Chapter 19, section 3, Hadith Number 658, p.46

<sup>21</sup> Talmud, p.148

<sup>22</sup> It is narrated that Moses said to his Lord, 'O Lord of the Universe, make me aware of your commandments and instructions regarding every issue':

'Sovereign of the Universe! Cause me to know what the final decision is on each matter of Law.' He replied: 'The majority must be followed; when the majority declare a thing permitted it is permissible, when the majority declare it forbidden it is not allowed; so that the Torah may be capable of interpretation with forty-nine points *pro* and forty-nine points *contra*.' (p. Sanh. 22a), quoted in *Talmud*, p.148

<sup>23</sup> Just as the Israelites extended the meaning of the Torah and the range of interpretive literature by incorporating the intellectual excavations of Tannaim, Amoraim and Saboraim, and endowed them with a kind of sacredness, thinking that all these were from God. Similarly, among us too, the understanding of the four imams is supposed to be in accordance with Allah's way of ensuring protection to Muhammad's faith. In the words of Shah Waliullah: *فالمذهب للمجتهدين سر* (Al Insaaf, p.62)

ألهمة الله تعالى العلماء وجمعهم عليه من حيث يشعرون أو لا يشعرون

It is generally believed that imitation of the four imams is to be taken not simply as an act of coincidence but as divinely ordained. Allama Tahawi writes on the margin of *Durre Mukhtar*: *من كان خارجاً عن هذه الأربعة فهو من أهل البدعة والنار*

<sup>24</sup> Talmud, pp. 154-155

<sup>25</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-e Sa'dat*, translated by Muhammad Saeedur Rahman Alvi, p. 458

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 460

<sup>27</sup> Talmud, p.179

<sup>28</sup> The Talmudic interpretation of the Torah had led to serious disputes in the Judaic jurisprudence. The same process had begun in Muslim history in the period of the Caliphate with narrating of events. Omer had put serious restrictions on it. The disagreement between Hillel and Shammai in the Mishnah totally confused the ordinary reader. These disputes on finer points of jurisprudence became a source of great inconvenience for the common people. To rectify the situation, people started the Sadducee movement that tried rigorously to pull down the barrier built around the Revelations by human beings. These people asserted that apart from the written Torah, no importance should be given to the oral accounts. But they could not succeed before the combined clout of the jurists. It is not only that the Pharisaic efforts got recognition as the belief of the majority of the people, but also it was accepted that God had revealed the complete Bible on Moses, including Talmud and Midrash. Even the answers to all the questions that any serious student would continue to ask till the end of the world would be taken to have emanated from God. It was argued that not only the Oral Torah was from God, but also all the processes of interpretation and analysis had also reached us from the heavens. The written Torah is a frozen entity that is immutable, but the Oral Torah evolves continuously in the light of the heavenly principles. The Orthodox Judaism, by accepting this principle, has in a way buried the Torah under wilful interpretations and longings.

- <sup>29</sup> Talmud, p.169
- <sup>30</sup> Deuteronomy, 24:1, Revised Standard Version, quoted in *Judaism*, C.M. Pilkington, London 2000, p.35
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.35
- <sup>32</sup> Exodus, Chapter 19, 1-6
- <sup>33</sup> C.M. Pilkington, op.cit., p.21
- <sup>34</sup> Matthew, Chapter 23, verses 23-28
- <sup>35</sup> Book of Amos, Chapter Nine, verses 1-4
- <sup>36</sup> The actual words of the Hadith are as follows: ما من عبد قال لا اله إلا الله ثم مات على ذلك إلا دخل الجنة قلت: وإن زنى وإن سرق؟ قال: وإن زنى وإن سرق. قلت: وإن زنى وإن سرق؟ قال: وإن زنى وإن سرق. على رغم انف أبي ذر.
- Mishkatul Masabih* (with English translation), vol.1, p.98
- <sup>37</sup> Abdul Bari, *Tajdeed-eDeen-e Kamil*, Lucknow, 1956, p.98.
- <sup>38</sup> see, *Bukhari*, 'Kitab Al-Salah'
- <sup>39</sup> For details, see, *Fatahul Bari*, vol. 13, Book of Tawheed, Chapter 19, Hadith number 7410, p.403; 'Book of faith', *Muslim*, Hadith Number 332, 336-339; 'Book of Commentary', *Tirmizi*, Surah 17, Hadith 19; *Musnad Ahmad* 4: (Quoted in, *Daeratul Ma'rif*, vol. 11, p.752)
- <sup>40</sup> 'Kitab al-Sefatul Qiyamah war-Raqaiq wal-War'a', *Tirmizi*, Chapter 13
- <sup>41</sup> Quoted in, Husain Shah Alipuri, *Afzal Al-Rasool*, Karachi, 1992, p.75
- <sup>42</sup> Allama Nooruddin Halbi, *Insaan al-ayoon*, ibid. pp.76-77
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 77
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.141

### SECTION III

- <sup>1</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, vol.1, p.282
- <sup>2</sup> See the chapter, 'Ridha Al-Kabeer', *Sunan Ibn Maja*
- <sup>3</sup> For a scholarly discussion on this issue, see detailed discussion on the supposed verse of stoning in Tamanna Imadi, *Jama' Al-Qura'n*, Karachi, 1994
- <sup>4</sup> Even though Ibn Kathir expressed a favourable view of Ibn Mas'ud as he could have had a different opinion about these two known surahs of the Qur'an, other than the consensus arrived at by the Prophet's Companions regarding them. But he has not produced any evidence regarding this. Thinking this, Abdullah bin Mas'ud must have held the same opinion. Among the new exegetes, Abul Ala Maududi has made this fabricated tradition the basis of his premise that the Prophet's Companions are not immune from mistakes and criticism. Rather than making such serious allegations against a reputed companion of the Prophet like Abdullah bin Mas'ud it would have been more reasonable if the reporters were subjected to scrutiny and correction. That they were practising falsehood is evident in the books of *rijal*. But as the exegetical literature largely followed the tradition of imitating the Predecessors it could not be expected normally that a fresh

interpretation would throw some new light on the understanding of the Qur'an. The detailed note on *muawwizatain* by Abul Ala Maududi which marks the zenith of his career as an exegete, cannot, by any measure, be called an improvement on the understanding of the Predecessors. First, the events that were described in the ancient books of exegesis and reports regarding the Prophet's being under the influence of black magic have been accepted by Abul Ala Maududi without any critical scrutiny, although if one applies the minimum standard of the conventional parameters of testing a report, or even on the parameters of intellectualism, these fanciful accounts can be proved to be unreliable. To claim that black magic had any effect on the Prophet is an allegation of serious proportions. And then to say that he was under its impact for six months or a year, and, in the words of Abul Ala Maududi, when he got out of its impact, 'it was exactly as though someone was tied up and then released,' is to cast aspersion not only on the person of the Prophet but on the status of Apostleship as well. The internal evidence contained in the Qur'an makes it loud and clear that *muawwizatain* are among those surahs revealed in Mecca where, in small and cryptic sentences, we have been told about different aspects of Allah's Unity (*tawheed*). The supposed incident related to black magic is said to have occurred in 7 hijra which, according to these reports, took place in Medina. To explain this contradiction, Abul Ala Maududi, like the old commentators, took resort to the long-drawn process of *tatbeeq* (harmonization), and reached the conclusion that several surahs of the Qur'an could have been revealed more than once, and that it could also be true that it had been revealed in Mecca but its special potency regarding black magic could have been communicated to the Prophet after the 'black magic event' in Medina. We feel that only those who do not properly understand the grandeur of the Revelation and recognise the personality of the Prophet can entertain such notions that the same Divine message could be revealed twice, first without a recipe for its use and second, with it. After all, what kind of a Prophet he would be (we seek Allah's refuge from such abominations) who, despite the presence of verses that acted as antidote to black magic, did not know how to use the potentials in them (as claimed by these reports) at the most opportune moment? In the exegetical footnotes of *muawwizatain*, Abul Ala Maududi also, like the earlier commentators, has included all these reports that have made it difficult to access these verses directly. It was also claimed that the potentiality of these verses extends beyond the Qur'an to the Torah and the Old Testament. In the words of Abul Ala Maududi, 'It has been known that it is permissible for the People of the Book to read from the Torah and the Old Testament to drive away black magic.' Moreover, he has recorded a report by Abu Sa'id Khudri in such approving terms that it provides justification for claiming remuneration for driving away black magic. The reported story runs as follows: Once the Prophet had sent some individuals in an expedition. On their way, they came by an Arab tribe whose members refused them any hospitality. In the meanwhile, the chief of the tribe was stung by a scorpion, and the people of the tribe sought help in the form of medicine or charms from these visitors. Abu Sa'id agreed to treat the person on the condition that as a remuneration the people of the tribe must pay him a flock of sheep. It is said

in the report that Abu Sa'id began to read surah Fatiha while massaging the spot with his saliva. Soon, the poison lost its effect. When the Prophet was asked if it was all right to charge remuneration for the task, he smiled and said, 'Take the sheep and mark my share in them as well'. On the one hand, Abul Ala Maududi takes this story to be reliable, on the other hand he forbids practitioners of charms and black magic to seek justification in this report for their practice. We feel that such incidents amount to casting aspersions on the Prophet's character. He was a man of sublime morals. It does not stand to reason that he would eat from the wealth earned through unlawful means. Such reports cannot be trusted even if they have been recorded in reliable books of tradition. Then, to attribute it to the Prophet of Allah that he said on the occasion — ان أحق ما أخذتم عليه أجرًا كتاب الله — i.e., you were quite within your rights to accept remuneration for reading out from Allah's Book, was, in fact, providing justification for the business of those people who use the verses of the Qur'an to cure the diseases through incantation. It was against the act of earning one's livelihood through the means disliked by Islam. In sum, the exegetical literature that has come down to us from the Predecessors has transformed the verses relating to Allah's Unity (*tawheed*) into verses of black magic in such a way that even those commentators who are critical of black magic cannot realise that they have, in fact, become advocates of Tabarian Islam rather than the Islam that emerges from the pages of the Qur'an. And that they are constantly being drawn into this quagmire of exegetical footnotes and conflicting and contradictory reports, so much so that any effort to get out of it pulls them back into the bog ineluctably.

<sup>5</sup> See, *Bukhari*, before the chapters on 'Fazail Al-Qur'an'. Such reports about Ubai bin Ka'b and Abdullah bin Mas'ud can also be found in *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Musnad Ahmad*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Marduiya, *Kanzul 'Ammal*, vol.1, p.178

<sup>7</sup> *Tirmizi*, vol.2, p.117; *Abu Dawood*, vol.2, p.199

<sup>8</sup> See, *Kanzul 'Ammal*, p.279. Cf. *Nasei, Kitab Al-Masahif, Ibn Abi Dawood, Mustadrak Hakim* etc. op.cit

<sup>9</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, vol.1, p.178

<sup>10</sup> *Tirmizi*, vol. 2, p.117, *Muslim* vol.1, p.274

<sup>11</sup> حدثني عبد الله بن محمد حدثنا سفيان عن عمرو بن عمرو عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قال 'كانت عكاظ و مجنة وذو المجاز أسواقاً في الجاهلية، فلما كان الإسلام فكأنهم تأثموا فيه، فنزلت (لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلاً مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ) في مواسم الحج. قرأها ابن عباس. (Fathul Bari, vol. 4, p. 338, Hadith no. 2050, 'Kitab Al-Bayu')

<sup>12</sup> Tamanna Imadi, *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.92, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.132

Similarly, regarding the chopping off the right hand of thieves, the judgment of the ulama, in fact, is derived from the verse attributed to Abdullah bin Mas'ud in a distorted version where — وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا was sought to be replaced by '*aimanahuma*' (ref. *Sahih Muslim*). Such distorted verses have influenced our exegetical and juristic thinking to a considerable extent. The impact of the statement attributed to Sa'd bin Waqqas — قرأت وله أخ أو أخت من أم فلكل — can be felt in

our juristic thinking related to inheritance. Some scholars have also shown the audacity to assert that a deviant version which they call 'qirat-e shazzah' can be more helpful than the original verses in untying the web of meaning. [See, Abul Baqa' Al-Akbari (d. 616 AH), *املاً ما من به الرحمن من وجوه الإعراب والقراءة في جميع القرآن*, Cairo, 1341 AH]. Sometimes, these alternative versions were considered to be helpful in enhancing the prestige of scholars. For example, the version attributed to Omer bin Abdul Aziz – *إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ* – (the word 'Allah' is subject and 'al-Ulama' is object; ref. *Tafseer Qurtabi*, vol.14, p.220) Zarkashi was constrained to take 'khashiyat' to mean 'honour' or 'kindness' and not 'fear'. According to Zarkashi (*Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.377) any statement by a reputed Companion of the Prophet needed to be given precedence, and that such statements are helpful in the elucidation and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses.

<sup>14</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, reported by Ibn Shahab Zahri, quoted in *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.102, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> *Bukhari*, reported by Shahb Zahri, under the heading of 'Tafsir Surrah Bar'a'

<sup>16</sup> *Tirmizi*, vol.2, p.137, quoted in *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.37, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> *Bukhari*, reported by Shahb Zahri, *ibid.* p.49

<sup>18</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, vol.1, p.280, *ibid.*, p.101

<sup>19</sup> *Tirmizi*, Hadith Al-Zahri, *ibid.*, p. 37

<sup>20</sup> *Itqan*, vol.1, p.165, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> *Tirmizi*, quoted in *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.99

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Abi Dawood, Ibn Asakar, quoted in *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.101

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fathul Bari*, chapter, 'Jama' Al-Qur'an'

<sup>24</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, reported by Ibn Abi Dawood and Ibn Al-Anbari, quoted in *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, pp.105-106

<sup>25</sup> Report by Ayisha, 'Kitab Al-Ridha' *Muslim*; same in *Nasei*

<sup>26</sup> It is commonly asserted in books of commentaries and biography of the Prophet that the Prophet did not know reading and writing. If the Prophet can be proved to be alienated from pen and paper, then oral transmission remains the only means for disseminating the Qur'anic message. Human memory, however retentive and powerful it may be, is always liable to error. That is why it would not have been considered desirable to depend on only oral retention for the preservation of a profound blessing like the Qur'an. We feel that for an individual of the Prophet's stature, it is not only insulting to be branded as illiterate, but also such a notion runs counter to the Qur'anic concept where it has been asserted that, among the written books, the Prophet is capable of reading the Qur'an and writing the verses down: *وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكَ* (*Al-Ankaboot:48*), i.e. 'before attaining Prophethood you were not capable of reading nor could you write anything with your own hand.' The misconception that the Prophet was illiterate spread because of the wrong interpretation of the word *ummi*, that has been generally taken by scholars and exegetes to mean illiterate. As a matter of fact, on several occasions in the Qur'an the word *umm* points to *ummul qura*, the old name of Mecca. Referring to the Israelites, the Qur'an states that they are untrustworthy, they do not return what is kept in their custody; it also states about

the polytheists of Mecca that *لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ* (Aale Imran:75). Referring to the Prophet, the Qur'an states in surah Jum'a: *هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ* (Al-Jum'a:2). It is Allah who appointed a Prophet among the inhabitants of Mecca who reads out verses of Allah to them. If the Prophet of the Meccans were illiterate, how could he read out verses to them? At another place it is stated: *وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ أَأَسْلَمْتُمْ* (Aale Imran:20), i.e. 'ask those who have been given the Book and those who live in Mecca whether they accept Islam?' In this context, the unlettered people that are being referred to along with the People of the Book certainly points to the fact that the People of the Book address others, i.e., those Arabs who were not among the People of the Book, particularly the descendants of Ishmael, as *ummi*. It does not imply that the persons so addressed are illiterate, but that they do not have the honour of being included among the People of the Book. It is historically true that the People of the Book considered themselves superior to the Arab polytheists who had no sacred book given to them. Even if one extends the meaning of the word *ummi* it might be taken to mean those people whose cultural and historical inheritance is devoid of any direction from a Divine Text. But it is surprising that for a guide to humanity about whose capability of reading and writing the Qur'an makes categorical pronouncements has been rendered illiterate by our exegetes. *الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ* *فَأَمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ* (Al-A'raf:157), or *الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ* *فَأَمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ* (Al-A'raf:158). On all such occasions, Allah appreciates the Prophet and asserts his purity, addresses him as 'al-nabi al-ummi'. But the translators and commentators have always taken the word to mean illiterate, and they considered it a great compliment for the Prophet. This notion had unintended consequences for the Prophet's followers some of whom began to think that if the Prophet himself was illiterate, then illiteracy was no evil, but could even be a blessing and an honour. When Allah addresses the Prophet as 'al-nabi al-ummi' with the objective of enhancing his honour, how could anyone say that illiteracy was an evil! As a matter of fact, as evident from historical facts, employing the prisoners of war in the battle of Badr to teach the children of Medina as a penalty is by itself demonstrative of the fact that reading and writing were highly valued among the followers of the Prophet. But those who insisted on presenting the Prophet as illiterate found it easy to project the view that for the Prophet's acolytes illiteracy was a virtue and that knowledge is a 'great veil' (*hijab-e akbar*). We feel that the notion that the Prophet was illiterate is the handiwork of exegetical and interpretive literature in Islam.

One tradition recorded by Bukhari from Aswad bin Qais Al-haqqi seems to have played a key role in transforming 'al-nabi al-ummi' to the 'illiterate Prophet'. It runs as follows: *انا أمة أمية لا نكتب* *ولا نحسب الشهر هكذا و هكذا وعقد الأيام في الثالثة والشهر هكذا و هكذا* This tradition, available through different sources, had Aswad bin Qais Al-haqqi as its original reporter who recorded it with reference to Omer bin Sa'id and Abdullah bin Omer. The image of the Prophet projected by this tradition is that of a person who was illiterate and had no knowledge of the three R's, and a member of a community that was ignorant and illiterate, whose members counted the days of the month on their fingers. This is the image that has effectively transformed 'al-nabi al-ummi' to the 'illiterate



Prophet'. Firstly, this tradition has been reported by a person who is known to have been extremely unreliable, and who had a penchant for creating discord and disputes. It is said that Aswad bin Qais Al-haqqi was at the vanguard of those who had come from Kufa to participate in the uprising against Othman. This is as far as the reputation of the transmitter is concerned. Secondly, to characterise the community of the Prophet as illiterate is a notion that flies directly in the face of historical facts and the assertions of the Qur'an. On the one hand, this tradition states that the Prophet did not know how to count even up to 30, and that even the entire community of Bani Ismail counted the days of the month on their fingers. On the other hand, in the Qur'an the references to numbers from one to one hundred thousand, and in the verse of Inheritance the occurrence of words such as 'half', 'third', 'fourth' 'fifth' etc. point to the fact that not only the Prophet but also the community to which he belonged were both quite familiar with the knowledge of numbers. Otherwise, how a Prophet who did not have the knowledge of the primary numbers could have discharged the responsibility of resolving complex computation? As to the question whether members of the Quraish tribe were illiterate, numerous arguments can be adduced to prove conclusively that they were not. The references to their sophisticated taste in poetry, their familiarity with calligraphy, the seven celebrated hangings (sab' muallaqat) on the walls of Ka'ba, the prisoners of war teaching the children of Medina, the instructions to believers in the Qur'an to write down business transactions for the sake of clarity, the written treaty between the Prophet when he entered the city and the people of Medina, and many other such instances falsify the claim made by this tradition. Interpreting *ummi* as 'illiterate' is a fabrication of the enemies of Islam. It cannot be corroborated by the internal evidence contained in the Qur'an and the authentic history of the period.

<sup>27</sup> See, *Itqan* (Urdu), vol. 1, p. 163, op. cit. For Ibn Abbas' report, see *Musnad Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Tirmizi, Nasei, Ibn Haban and Hakim*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.165

<sup>29</sup> *Kanz al-Ammal*, vol.1, p.280

<sup>30</sup> 'Kitab Al-tabyan', quoted in Muhammad Ajmal Khan, *Tartib Nuzool Qur'an Karim*, Allahabad, 1941, p.8

<sup>31</sup> It is said that Abdullah bin Mas'ud's version was different from Othman's version. According to reporters, surah Nisa occurred first in this version, followed by surah Aale Imran. (*Itqan*, vol. 1, p. 66). Sayuti has recorded Ibn Mas'ud's entire textual arrangement through Ibn Ashtah, which is quite different from the Othman's version.

<sup>32</sup> 'Kitab Al-tabyan', quoted in Ajmal Khan, op. cit. p.8

<sup>33</sup> The following are the actual words of Imam Ibn Taimiyah's edict:

وقد قال شيخ الإسلام تقي الدين احمد بن تيمية رحمه الله تعالى. إن ترتيب السور بالاجتهاد لا بالنص في قول جمهور العلماء من الحنابلة والمالكية والشافعية، فيجوز قراءة هذه قبل هذه، وكذا في الكتابة، ولهذا تنوعت مصاحف الصحابة في كتابتها. ولما اتفقوا على المصحف في زمن عثمان رضي الله عنه صار هذا مما سنه الخلفاء الراشدون وقد دل الحديث على ان لهم سنة يجب إتباعها. وواضح كل الوضوح إن محل إتباع هذه السنة التي يجب إتباعها. إنما هو في كتابته المصحف الذي يكون للتلاوة لا في كتابة تفسير

وشرح لمعاني الآيات والسور الكريمة. فان ذلك غير داخل في موضوع اختلاف العلماء أو اتفاقهم إطلاقاً. بل هم فيما روي متفقون على سواغيته وجوازه.

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Ajmal Khan, op. cit., p.9

<sup>35</sup> *Wafiyat Al-a'yaan*, vol.1, p.125, Cairo, 1310 hijra

<sup>36</sup> It is said about Ibn Ziyad that he entrusted this work to a man of Persian origin that he should write an 'alif' at all places in the Qur'an where any word had been deleted. Thus, according to Ibn Abi Dawood, two thousand such errors were rectified. (See, Ibn Abi Dawood, *Kitab Al-Masahif*)

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Abi Dawood has recorded it in *Kitab Al-Masahif* with reference to Abi Jamila that Hajjaj bin Yusuf Saqafi had made changes at eleven places in the Othmanic version. For details, see the above book.

<sup>38</sup> See, Ibn Khalkan, *Tazkerah Hajjaj bin Yusuf*, p.24

<sup>39</sup> Among the latter scholars of repute, Sayuti has also included Hasan Basari in this list. See, *Itqan*, vol.2, p.419, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, pp.250-51

<sup>41</sup> In the words of Omer bin Abdul Aziz, 'if the followers of other prophets come together and present the sinners of their times and if we only present Hajjaj, then by God, they would be no match for him.' (Quoted in Shibli Nomani, *Sirat Nomani*, Part I, p.24, Maktaba Burhan, 1956.

<sup>42</sup> See, Ibn Al-Jazri, *Al-Nashr fi Qir'at Al-'Ashr*, vol.1, p.32

<sup>43</sup> It is said that Gabriel, in the final round of the reading of the entire Qur'an, included Zayd bin Thabit also. (*Fathul Bari*, quoted by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi in his preface to the Urdu *Tarjuma Qur'an*, p.4). Also see, *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.132, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> To contradict this view, Tamanna Imadi has undertaken a detailed discussion in his book, *Jama' Al-Qur'an*. He has endeavoured to demonstrate, with the help of signs and evidence, that no single script or style of calligraphy can contain within itself different readings or differences in an even-handed manner. See, Tamanna Imadi, *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, pp.288-290, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.283

<sup>46</sup> For example, Abul Ala Maududi holds the view that the Othmanic Qur'anic version was devoid of points (*nuqtah*), and diacritical marks, he considers that it contains within itself all the seven levels (*sab' ahraf*). See, *Tarjumanul Qur'an*, Monthly, No. 3, June 1959. Among the ancients, Qazi Abu Bakr Baqelani is among the first adherents of the view that the seven levels are preserved in the Othmanic version. See, *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.224

<sup>47</sup> Allama Badruddin Aini, *Umdatul Qari*, Kitab Al-Hazumaat, vol.12, p.258

<sup>48</sup> *Tafsir Tabari*, vol.1, p.15

<sup>49</sup> Moses' vision of God on the Mount Sinai has been described as follows: 'And all the people perceived the thundering and the lightning and the voice of the horn and the mountain smoking.' (Exodus 20:18)

Zohar has stressed the following point while elucidating these verses:

'divine words were imprinted on the darkness of the cloud that enveloped the real presence of God, so that Israel at the same time heard them, as Oral Doctrine, and saw them as written Doctrine.'

Zohar has also expressed this thought that every letter contained seventy voices, on which basis there could be seventy interpretations of the Revelation. Probably, this is the thought that has crept into our Islamic literature through the fabricated tradition of *انزل القرآن على سبعة أحرف*. For more details, see, Leo Schyaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, London, 1971, p.16

<sup>50</sup> The following are said to be the words of the tradition: *كان الكتاب الأول ينزل من باب واحد على حرف واحد ونزل القرآن من سبعة أبواب على سبعة أحرف زاجر وأمر و حلال و حرام و محكم و متشابه و أمثال الخ.*

*Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.216, and *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.128

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.220

<sup>52</sup> *Tafsir Tabari*, vol.1, p.10

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.122; similar other examples have also been given, for example, *فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ* رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا was also read as *أَسْفَارِنَا*

<sup>54</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.222. It has been recorded that when Imam Malik was asked as to which one among 'ya'lamun' and 'ta'lamun' was correct, he replied that both were correct. The reporter says that people had their own texts (versions) and they read both. Another example of this kind is – *وَإِنظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ تُنْشِئُهَا* (Al-Baqara:259) which was read with 'nansharuha', i.e., with 'ra' in place of 'za'. (Ahmad Miyati, *Athaf fazla Al-Bashar fil Qira'a Arba' Ashar*, p.162)

<sup>55</sup> *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.79

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121

<sup>58</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.22

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Itqan*, Urdu, Vol.1, p.123

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122

<sup>61</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.336

<sup>62</sup> The misconception about the tradition regarding *sab' ahraf* as being a reputed one having a continuous chain of transmitters thrived because of an event recorded for the first time by Abu Ya'la Mausli (d. 207 hijra) in his book, *Al-Musnad Al-Kabeer*. As a result of constant reporting and copying by people it had assumed a dimension of a 'continuous' tradition. The event has been described as follows: Once, during his discourse from the pulpit in the Prophet's mosque, Othman had declared 'I want all those who have heard the tradition regarding *sab' ahraf* from the Prophet himself to swear by Allah.' In reply such a large number of the Prophet's Companions stood up to bear witness to the tradition that it was difficult to count them. At this Othman said, 'I have also heard the tradition from the Prophet.' In this event, the fact that a large number of the Prophet's Companions stood up right in the Prophet's mosque presented such a spectacle that could be cited as an evidence of the tradition being authentic and continuous. However, if one investigates into the real incident, the entire account will be found to fall in the category of

'artificial continuity' (*tawatur masnu'i*). One thing, the account of so many of the Prophet's Companions standing up to bear witness regarding this tradition comes to us for the first time in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century hijra through the writing of an author. Apart from this, reliable books of history and reports are devoid of any reference to this event, so much so that the editors of *Sehah* also do not make any reference to this significant event. Of course, they have recorded this tradition in their books from other sources. Thus, there seems to be no reason why they should ignore this event of collective corroboration by the Prophet's Companions. One comes across references to this discourse by Othman in the books of reports wherein he stressed the importance of removing the prevalent disagreements regarding the Qur'anic Text, at the time of victory in Armenia. It is said that as a consequence of his initiative that the Othmanic version, i.e., the current version of the Qur'anic Text came into being. This event cannot be considered reliable on the parameters of both the extrinsic and intrinsic value. We have already demonstrated in the last chapter, through internal evidence in the Qur'an and historical facts, that before the Othmanic period the Qur'an had already come into existence as a Book under the supervision of the Prophet himself. As to the question that seeing much disagreement among people regarding the Qur'anic Text Othman asked people to bear witness in public to the fact that according to the Prophet's own admission the Qur'an was revealed on seven levels, this claim runs counter to the same traditions because in them it has been claimed that Othman's distinction lay in the fact that by removing disagreements on the Qur'an and the Qur'anic Text, he brought people together on one level. The following statement by Ali is also proffered in supporting this supposed initiative by Othman: لا تقولوا في عثمان إلا خيراً فوالله ما فعل الذي فعل في المصاحف إلا عن ما منا ( *Kitab Al-Musahif Al-Ibn Abi Dawood*, p.22, Egypt, 1355 hijra, and *Fathul Bari*, vol.9, p.15). It passes understanding how a person who has been alleged to have done away with six levels, can be credited with taking people's evidence regarding the fact that the Qur'anic Text contains seven levels, because this would go against his stance. Othman's supposed discourse regarding the compilation of the Qur'an cannot be considered reliable for the additional reason that the timeline described in the tradition is inconsistent. The victory of Armenia pertains to the period after 25 hijra, and in the discourse by Othman reported by Ibn Abi Dawood, Othman is purported to have said, 'O my people, it is just thirteen years that the Prophet has departed from us, and you have started disputes on the Qur'anic Text!' the period of thirteen years after the death of the Prophet was to be completed on the martyrdom of Othman. Granted that in his address while holding the office of the caliph, Othman might refer to the period of 13 years; however, the victory of Armenia which, according to the historians, took place between 25 hijra and 30 hijra can, in no way, be put back to 23 hijra This is the state of affairs so far as the claim to 'continuity' and historical authenticity are concerned. Besides, if one undertakes a comparative and critical study of the traditions related to this event, their inconsistency casts a shadow of doubt on their authenticity.

First of all, it must be pointed out that Shahab Zahri figures in the chain of transmitters of both the reports regarding *sab' ahraf* in *Bukhari*. His unreliability as a transmitter may not have

been apparent to the compilers of *Sihah Sitta* but the later researches have cast serious doubts on him. We have already drawn attention to the fact that in the books of traditions Shahab Zahri remains the main source of many of the controversial traditions such as those related to compilation of the Qur'an, disagreements about different kinds of reading (*qir'at*), the abrogator and the abrogated, Ayisha's (un)chastity (*ifk*), mutual disagreement among the Prophet's Companions, the supposed bickering between Abu Bakr and Ali, and so on and so forth. Being a member of Zahra tribe, known for its unruly behaviour and mischief-making, he became famous as 'Zahri'; however, people commonly thought him to be a member of Quraish tribe or from Madina, and because of this supposed cultural lineage and his supposed spatial proximity with the Prophet scholars of traditions regarded his reports as being reliable. But it has been written very clearly in *Tahzeeb Al-Tahzeeb* – كان الزهري يكون بايلا و للزهري هناك ضيعة و كان يكتب عنه هناك الماجنون – i.e., Zahri lived in Ila, he had property there and from there he wrote the traditions under the name, Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Abi Salma al-Majithun. In the context of the compilation of the Qur'an, Zahri has referred to Abdullah bin Mas'ud's frustration for not being included in the committee formed for compiling the Qur'an, and that he spread the word among the people of Kufa that in comparison with Zayd bin Thabit he was far more deserving of this honour. Rather, according to a report in *Tirmizi*, he was in favour of keeping intact the older text and instructed people to keep it hidden, presenting the following verse in support of his view – وَمَنْ يَغْلُلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا غَلَّ – وَنَمُوْا فِيْ حَرْبٍ لِّقَوْمٍ ظَالَمٍ لِّنَفْسِهِمْ أُولَئِكَ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ لِقَاءُ رَبِّهِمْ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُكْفُرُونَ (Aale Imran:16), though, as a matter of fact, this verse warns people against hiding the Qur'anic Text. Not only that the traditions attributed to Shahab Zahri cast aspersions on the characters of the Prophet's Companions, but he can be said to have been responsible for distortion of meaning, if it is proved for a fact that these traditions have really been reported by him. (Quoted in Tamanna Imadi, *Jama' Al-Qur'an*, p.239). As he was among the early compilers of the traditions, scholars of traditions have given him considerable importance. This could have been also for the reason that they wrongly took him to be an inhabitant of Medina, thus enjoying spatial proximity with the Prophet.

Now we may turn attention to the inconsistencies found in these traditions and decide for ourselves how reliable they can be. The following is the text of the Hadith recorded in *Bukhari* through Ibn Abbas: حدثنا سعيد بن عفير قال حدثني عقيل عن ابن شهاب حدثني عبيد الله بن عبد الله أن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما حدثه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: أقرأني جبريل على حرف فراجعت، فلم أزل أستريده ويزيدني حتى انتهى إلى سبعة أحرف. (Fazail Al-Qur'an', *Fathul Bari*, vol.8, p.639, Hadith no. 4991)

The second tradition has been recorded through Omer and contains a detailed account of the incidents involving Hisham bin Hakim: حدثنا سعيد بن عفير قال حدثني الليث حدثني عقيل عن ابن شهاب قال حدثني عُروَةُ بن الزبير أن المسور بن مخرمة وعبد الرحمن بن عبد القاري حدثاه أنهما سمعا عمر بن الخطاب يقول 'سمعت هشام بن حكيم يقرأ سورة الفرقان في حياة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، فاستمعت لقراءته فإذا هو يقرأ على حروف كثيرة لم يقرئها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، فكذبت أساوره في الصلاة، فتصبرت حتى سلم، فلببته بردائه فقلت: من أقرأك هذه السورة التي سمعتك تقرأ؟ قال: أقرئها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، فقلت: كذبت، فإن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قد أقرئها على غير ما قرأت. فانطلقت به أقوده إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقلت: إني سمعت هذا يقرأ بسورة الفرقان على حروف لم تقرئها. فقال رسول الله صلى الله

عليه وسلم: أرسله، اقرأ يا هشام. فقرأ عليه القراءة التي سمعته يقرأ، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: كذلك أنزلت. ثم قال: اقرأ يا عمر، فقرأت للقراءة التي أقرأني، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: كذلك أنزلت، إن هذا القرآن أنزل على سبعة أحرف، فاقروا ما تيسر منه'.

(‘Fazail Al-Qur’an’, *Fathul Bari*, vol.8, p.639-640, Hadith no. 4992)

If one studies these two traditions, one feels that Omer had taken Hisham bin Hakim to the Prophet to resolve the dispute regarding the reading/s of the Qur’an. This was an issue that basically arose from Hisham’s disagreement about the reading of the Qur’an, and the Hadith regarding *sab’ ahraf* is said to be a response to this. In *Sahih Muslim*, this event has been reported through Ubai bin Ka’b, as follows: Ubai bin Ka’b was in the mosque when he heard someone reciting the Qur’an during salat that he felt to be different from the way it was normally recited. Shortly, another person entered the mosque and he recited it in another manner. Ka’b took both of them to the Prophet and mentioned their different readings of the Qur’an. The Prophet heard both the reciters separately and appreciated both of them. This incident created serious doubts in Ka’b’s mind about the Prophet’s genuineness. According to these reports, the Prophet could understand Ka’b’s state of mind and thumped his chest that sent him reeling and he felt as though he was having a vision of Allah. The Prophet reassured Ka’b and said, ‘I was instructed to read the Qur’an only with one linguistic construct (harf). But I appealed to Allah against it, and thus got His permission to read it in two, three, four ... even up to seven textual parallels (ahraf).’ (*Sahih Muslim*, vol.2, p.390, Hadith no, 1787; English translation, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, Beirut, op. cit.)

First, it is difficult to understand whether this incident involved Ka’b or Omer. According to the report in *Bukhari*, Omer was engaged in salat when Hisham heard him reciting the relevant verse, whereas the reports in *Muslim* have it that two unknown persons had recited the Qur’an loudly during salat in the mosque. Neither these two persons have been named, nor has it been clarified whether the custom of performing the salat by the Prophet’s Companions individually or separately was in vogue in the Prophet’s mosque during his lifetime. If it was an additional prayer (*nafl*) for earning merit, then there was no question of reading the verses aloud; and if it was an obligatory prayer (*faradh*), then why did they pray alone, because at least Ka’b was present there when they performed the prayer, and he should have prayed along with them. There are other inconsistencies as well in the traditions pertaining to ‘seven multiples’ that affect their reliability. In *Muslim* itself, it has been recorded through Ubai bin Ka’b that Gabriel had come down to the earth with the permission of ‘seven multiples’ at a spot where the pond of Banu Ghaffar was situated. (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p.391, Hadith no. 1789; English translation, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, Beirut). As opposed to this, Tirmizi has recorded it through none other than Ubai bin Ka’b himself that this incident involving Gabriel’s appearance had occurred near the rocks of Marwah. (Ref. *Al-Nasr fi Qir’at Ashr*, vol.1, p.20). According to a tradition recorded in *Musnad Ahmad*, through Abu Bakr, the request to read the Qur’an with more than one linguistic construct was done by Michael on behalf of the Prophet, as can be seen here – إن جبرئيل قال اقرأ القرآن –

على حرف قال ميكائيل: استزده حتى بلغ سبعة أحرف. Those who are adept at reconciling these contradictions among the traditions might very well draw a comprehensive perspective where all these conflicting views could be accommodated, but despite reconciling these contradictions it would be difficult to make a breakthrough as far as the understanding of 'sab' ahraf' is concerned. Even after continuous debates and thoughtful and scholarly researches spanning over twelve centuries the ulama are still not in a position to solve the riddle of *sab' ahraf*. Let alone the question of solving the riddle, those who make tall claims regarding their expertise in the art of harmonisation (*tatbeeq*) have not yet been successful in presenting an interpretation of this fabricated tradition that would be consistent with their own reports, and that would accept the fact that each letter of the Qur'an has come from Allah and has remained inviolate.

In the latter part of the tradition from *Musnad Ahmad* to which an allusion has been made above, it has been said further that one can read the Qur'an in seven linguistic parallels as long as he does not replace the verse related to blessings with the verse related to penalty. This Hadith goes so far as to assert, through examples, that one can also use synonyms for the original word, for example, as synonyms for 'ta'al' one can use 'aqbal' 'hallam', 'ezhab', 'isra' or 'ajjil' in its place. This gives the impression that the seven parallels or *sab' ahraf* have not come from Allah, but that people have been given permission for these alternative readings of the Qur'an. There is certainly the caveat that one should not be too liberal in one's use of synonyms so that a verse related to blessings is changed into a verse related to penalty. If one goes by the tradition recorded in *Muslim*, the Prophet's alleged act of sending back Gabriel again and again despite Allah's clear instruction to read the Qur'an in one linguistic construct, extracting more concessions for his followers on the plea that they are weak, or if one goes by the tradition in *Tirmizi*, the Prophet's statement to Gabriel that he (the Prophet) has been sent among the unlettered people who include decrepit old men, old women and raw young people who deserved some benevolent treatment, or by another tradition from *Tirmizi* that make the Prophet say, 'I have been sent to a community that had never had any truck with books' – لم يقرأ كتاباً قط – give one the image of a Prophet who (May Allah save us from such abominations) interferes again and again with Allah's Will to extract concessions for his followers. How does it behove a Prophet who has been sent down to the world to guide people till the Day of Judgement and whose area of operation extends far beyond Mecca to take issue with Allah's instructions again and again in an effort to alter them rather than obey them unquestioningly? We feel that this supposed image of the Prophet seems to be a copy of the Israeli prophets who had been entrusted with the task of leading the Israelites and finding their lost sheep. In this context, if one keeps in mind the fabricated event related to the Prophet's celestial journey during which (it is alleged that), according to the instruction of Moses, he persuaded Allah to reduce the number of daily prayers, it becomes easier to understand how the same Israeli psychology with its specific tone and tenor is active behind all such fabricated traditions that sometimes present the image of Muhammad as a Prophet who was

inferior in intellect and experience to Moses, and at other times reduce the international stature of the Prophet to the local environs of Mecca and Medina.

We feel that for dismissing the concept of 'seven multiples' this argument is enough that it directly harms the concept of the Qur'an as an immutable text. If the Qur'an, invested with seven parallel texts, has been reduced to a text with just one linguistic construct because of the interference by Othman and other companions of the Prophet, then it must be taken as a much inferior text. Conversely, if we accept the view that all the seven parallels have been preserved in the script of Othmanic version encompassing dialectal differences, use of vowel points and diacritical marks and other linguistic particularities, it would amount to a wishful thinking and a tall claim that cannot be proved on the crucible of intellection. Further, these trivial claims will also pave the way for distortion in the Qur'anic text. If one wants to have an idea of the dangerous implications inherent in this, he can read *Kitab Al-Masahif* by Ibn Abi Dawood, which is regarded as a path-breaking book on the subject. The author has shown how the same verse has been reported through different sources and by different companions of the Prophet that if one begins to believe in these traditions then one is sure to lose faith in the idea of the Qur'an as an immutable text, each word of which comes from Allah.

Besides, there is so much inconsistency in different versions of the verses, their past scripts, calligraphy and reading that it is difficult to quantify it. Books like *إتحاف الفضلاء المبشر في القراءات الأربعة عشر* and *النشر في القراءات العشر* seems to have been written with the specific objective of preserving the fabricated verse related to *sab' ahraf* and the disputes surrounding it in the pages of history. The points of disagreement on this issue among known scholars reach close to one hundred thousand, and the disagreements that have acquired the 'continuous' status at some stage would also number close to a thousand, according a conservative estimate. As for those people who wished to reduce *sab' ahraf* to seven accents of reading (*sab' qirat*), there are references to about ten thousand points of disagreement in their books. The source of all these manufactured and fabricated disagreements is the tradition regarding *sab' ahraf* or seven multiples that had provided justification for change and distortion in the Divine verses. In the light of the dangerous implications of this issue we have just two options – either we take all these reports to be true and declare the current Othmanic version of the Qur'anic text as the version of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, and also admit the fact that there are some superfluous verses in it, as it is said about the *muawwizatain* on the supposed authority of Abdullah bin Mas'ud; similarly, we also accept facts that the ayah *ridha'at* has been wasted, ayah *rajm* could not be incorporated in the text, and surah *Ahzab* could not be had in the complete form because of the martyrdom of some of the Prophet's Companions in the battle of Yamama. Otherwise the presence of these fabricated verses in the books of recitation and the existence of the rejected verses in the footnotes of the books of exegesis would keep our scholars, as they had kept Ibn Taimiyah, under the delusion that the non-Othmanic readings gain in importance and they become even necessary when they pertain to matters of shariah or commands (*ahkam*). To restore faith in the Qur'an it is essential that we



declare these fabricated verses and fabricated readings available in all kinds of books to be unreliable. It can be possible only when we display the courage to totally dismiss the fabricated tradition of 'seven multiples', at least to preserve the sanctity of the Qur'an.

<sup>63</sup> See, *Tafsir Ibn Jareer*

<sup>64</sup> Imam Tahawi, *Mushkil Al-Athar*, vol. 4, pp. 185-186; *Dairatul Ma'rif*, Hyderabad, Deccan, 1323 hijra

<sup>65</sup> Abul Khair Muhammad bin Al-Jazri, *Al-Nashr fi Qirat Al-Ashr*, vol. 1, p. 31

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., vol.1, pp.18-19

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Hazm, *Al-Mufasssal fil-Milal wa al-Ahwa-wa-al-Nehal*, Baghdad: Maktaba Al-Musanna, vol.2, pp.77-78

<sup>68</sup> Abul Waleed Al-Baji, *Al-Muntaqa: Sharah Muatta*, Egypt, 1331 hijra vol. 1, p. 347

<sup>69</sup> Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa*, Egypt, 1356 hijra, vol.1, p.65

<sup>70</sup> Mulla Ali Qari, *Mirqatul Mafatih*, Multan, 387 hijra, vol.5, p.16

<sup>71</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Al-Musaffa*, Delhi: Matbua Faruqi, p.187

<sup>72</sup> Anwar Shah Kashmiri, *Faiz Al-Bari*, vol.3, pp.321-322

<sup>73</sup> Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, *Al-Fauz Al-Kabeer fi Usool Al-Tafseer* (Arabic translation), Lahore, pp.18-19

<sup>74</sup> *Qurtabi* says, "There is disagreement among our religious scholars about abrogation in 'akhbar'. However, the majority believes that if abrogation operates in 'akhbar' then the allegation of falsehood could be brought against Allah, which would render the operation infructuous. For example, وَمِنْ تَمَرَاتِ النَّخِيلِ وَالْأَعْنَابِ تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْهُ سَكَرًا (Al-Nahl: 67), *Tafsir Qurtabi*, vol.2, p.45

<sup>75</sup> See, Mulla Jeewan, *Tafsir Ahmadiya*, p.4

<sup>76</sup> see, Ibn Salamah, pp.125-185

<sup>77</sup> Qazi Abu Bakr, popularly known as, Ibn Arabi, *Ahkam Al-Qur'an*

<sup>78</sup> *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, pp.60-61

<sup>79</sup> Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, *Al-Fauz Al-Kabeer fi Usool Al-Tafseer*, pp.18-19

<sup>80</sup> See, *Tafsir Al-Minar*, vol.2, pp.150-157; also see, Muhammad Al-Khusri, *Tarikh Al-Tashrih Al-Islami*, pp.23-24

<sup>81</sup> *Tafsir Qurtabi*, vol.2, p.44

<sup>82</sup> see, *Usool Al-Sarkhasi*, 2:67

<sup>83</sup> *Kashshaf*, vol.2, p.494

<sup>84</sup> *Rooh Al-Ma'ni*, vol.1, pp.352-353

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Al-Arabi, *Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, vol.1, p.205; also see, *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, p.62

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.388

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p.210

<sup>88</sup> *Al-Burhan*, vol.2, p.31

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Salamah, *Al-Nasikh Wal-Mansookh*, p.321; 'ayah saif' has been taken to be the fifth ayah of Surah Tauba, — 'فَأَقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ'

- <sup>90</sup> Ibn Salamah, *Al-Nasikh Wal-Mansookh*, p.32-33
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid.p.117
- <sup>92</sup> see, *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, p.57
- <sup>93</sup> Ibn Sallamah, *Al-Nasikh Wal-Mansookh*, p.14; also *Al-Burhan*, vol.2, p.33
- <sup>94</sup> *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, p.64
- <sup>95</sup> This fabricated verse – ayah Rajm – has been reported through Abi bin Ka'b. See, *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, p.64
- <sup>96</sup> From a different source Abi Yamama bin Sahl has reported this verse (ayah Rajm) through his aunt thus. See, *Al-Itqan*, vol.2, pp.64-65
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid. vol.2, p.65
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup> This saying by Ibn Omer has been reported by Abu Ubaid, who recorded it on the authority of Ismail bin Ibrahim through Ayyub bin Naafe'. See, *Al-Itqan*, vol. 2, p. 64
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid. p.66
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid. p.65
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid. pp.65-66
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid. p.66
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid. p.66; and *Tafsir Tabari*, vol.1, p.525
- <sup>108</sup> *Asbab Al-Nazool Lil-Sayuti*, p.2
- <sup>109</sup> For example, Imam Wahidi (d.427 hijra) says, as long as one does not know about the actual event of revelation and the circumstances of revelation, one cannot interpret the verse.' (*Asbaab Nuzool* by Wahidi, p.3). According to Ibn Taimiyah, 'Familiarity with the circumstances of revelation helps one understand and unravel the meaning of the verse, because it is natural that when one knows the circumstances one can understand the implications better' (Quoted in, *Uloom Al-Qur'an* by Subhi Saleh). Similarly, Ibn Daqeeq Al-Eid says, 'Recognising the circumstances of revelation is an important means of accessing the meaning and objective of the Qur'an.' (*Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.17)
- <sup>110</sup> see, *Al-Itqan*, vol.1, p.222
- <sup>111</sup> *Asbaab Nuzool Lil-Wahidi*, pp.3-4
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.24
- <sup>113</sup> Loc. cit.
- <sup>114</sup> *Tafsir Tabari*, vol.1, p.546
- <sup>115</sup> As a consequence of the notion that familiarity with circumstances of revelation is a key to the understanding of the Qur'an, the footnotes of our exegetical books have become littered with unreliable and false historical reports; this has also made us change our own concept about the

Revelation. For example, if there are different reports about the same verse and if there are inconsistencies in those reports, regarding even the persons and the events, in such a situation the exegetes take recourse to their self-styled art of harmonisation (*tatbeeq*), even if it means changing their own concept of Revelation. The thought that some Qur'anic verses have been revealed more times than they actually figure in the current version is a telling example of the change in the concept of the Revelation, even though no proof for such a thought can be found either in the Qur'an or genuine reports. It is said that the circumstances of revelation of the verse – وَالَّذِينَ يَزُمُونَ أَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُمْ شُهَدَاءُ إِلَّا أَنْفُسُهُمْ فَشَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَادَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ – (Al-Nur: 6), as described in *Bukhari* and *Muslim*, are as follows: this verse was revealed as a consequence of the enquiry made by the Chief of Bani Ajlan, and its transmitter is said to be Awaimar Asim bin Adi. However, according to another report in the same *Bukhari*, this verse is said to have been revealed as a consequence of the enquiry made by Hilal bin Ummiya who had brought the charge of unchastity against his wife, Shareek bin Sahma. The scholars of tradition like Khateeb Baghdadi and Hafiz Ibn Hajar Asqalani have characterised both these events as the circumstances of revelation of the above verse (*Itqan*, vol. 1, p. 84). When both these accounts have been accepted as equally reliable in exegetical literature, despite the differences in places and persons involved, it has been supposed that the verse must have been revealed on both these occasions. This is because for scholars, it was not easy to discount either of the events as the circumstance of revelation, so they thought it convenient to take both the accounts on board, even if it meant accepting some changes in their concept of the Revelation. Similarly, for the verse – وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ – وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ مَا عَاقَبْتُمْ بِهِ – وَلَئِنْ صَبَرْتُمْ لَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِلصَّابِرِينَ (Al-Nahl: 126), Bahaiqi and Al-Bazzaz have presented the event of Hamza's death as the context of its revelation, whereas Tirmizi and Hakim had asserted that this verse was revealed in the context of the victory of Mecca (*Itqan*, vol.1, p. 85). For the adherents of the art of harmonisation among irreconcilable reports, there remains no other alternative except believing that the verse was revealed on both the occasions.

Our exegetes have frequently used this plea in their effort to harmonise different accounts of the circumstances of revelation. It is stated in *Bukhari* through Al-Musaib that at the moment of Abu Talib's death, the Prophet made this offer to him that if he simply utters the *kalima* (profession of faith) he (the Prophet) would plead his case with Allah. ('Kitab Al-Tafsir', *Fathul Bari*, vol. 8, p. 194). To restrain the Prophet from this effort the following verse – مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ – مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ وَلَوْ كَانُوا أُولِي قُرْبَىٰ (Al-Tawba:113) was revealed. However, according to other reports, this verse was revealed at Medina. Similarly, it is said that surah Ikhlas was revealed as a result of the doubts expressed by the polytheists at Mecca, but according to other reports this surah was revealed as a response to the People of the Book at Medina (*Al-Burhan*, vol.1, p.30). Surah Fateha, too, is said to have been revealed at Mecca by some reports while according to some other reports it was revealed at Medina. Rather than undertaking a critical scrutiny of these claims and counter-claims the exegetes found it convenient to accept all the claims as equally valid, even if it meant that the verse was revealed more than once. According to Zamakhshari, it

would not be surprising if it was done to attribute greatness and nobility to the verses and compensate for the human tendency to forgetfulness.

<sup>116</sup> *Kashshaf*, vol.4, p.303

<sup>117</sup> see footnotes on 'ayah Tatheer' and 'ayah Mubahila', *Tafsir-o-tarjuma Qur'an Majeed* by Maulana Muhammad Junagarhi, Medina; *Tabari*, vol.3, pp.293-99; vol.10, pp.296-98; *Jalalain*, p.67, 510, take it to be *nisa al-nabi*. *Qurtabi*, vol.3, pp.66-67; vol.13, p.119; *Fathul Qadeer*, vol.1, pp.440-41; *Rooh Al-Ma'ni*, vol.2, pp.185-86; vol.11, pp.193-200; *Ibn Kathir*, vol.3, pp.491-494; though there are other reports too, but precedence is accorded to Nisa Al-Nabi (though only those reports have been mentioned that consider Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain to constitute 'ahl-e bait', i.e. members of the prophet's household. Alusi considers *nisa al-Nabi* to be 'ahl-e bait'), *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, vols.7-8, p.71; *Kashshaf*, vol.1, pp.368-369; vol.3, p.53; also include *nisa al-Nabi* among the 'ahl-e bait'.

<sup>118</sup> See Shahab Zahri's report in *Bukhari, Fathul Bari*, vol.5, pp.319-22, Hadith no. 2661; also see footnotes to *Tafsir Tabari*, vol.9, pp.277-80; *Qurtabi*, vols.11-12, pp.131-34; *Rooh Al-Ma'ni*, vol.9, p.310; *Tafsir Razi*, vol.12, p.150; *Al-Kashshaf*, vol.3, pp. 217-18, *Jalalain*, p.422; *Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an*, vol.4, pp.2495-6

<sup>119</sup> The event that Tabari, Jassas and Razi have characterised as the occasion for revelation of the 'ayah Jalbab' – جَلَابِبُهُنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِبِهِنَّ – runs as follows: In Medina, the infidels used to tease Muslim women. So, to distinguish free women from common slave girls Allah gave commands for the wearing of veils. In an effort to rationalise this command, Raazi pointed out that it could have two uses. By the manner of dressing it would be obvious that the veiled women were from decent families, because when the women would cover the part of the bodies that needed to be covered, no man would expect that such a woman could be persuaded to commit sin with him. This image of the social life at Medina during the Prophet's time has been recorded by Ibn Ka'b Al-Qarzi on the authority of Ibn Abi Sabrah. There are some historical errors in these events that indicate the tradition to be feeble. Firstly, the transmitting chain of this report does not go beyond Ibn Ka'b Al-Qarzi, and Al-Qarzi himself comes after the generation of the Prophet's Companions. In other words, this Hadith is 'interrupted' (*mursal*). Moreover, Ibn Ubai is known to have been a fabricator of traditions. All the events that have been described regarding the veiling of decent women as an illustration or elucidation of this verse have all been *mursal*. They had very little connection with reality. This also goes against the culture of Islam where, on the level of faith, there is no difference between the slave and the master, free women and slave girls. What kind of Islamic society is this where decent women are instructed to put on veil to save themselves from the mischiefs of wicked people but the slave girls are left to the mercy of the same sinners? This group of exegetes who formulate their arguments on the basis of such weak reports would seem to hold strange views about slave women. Just consider this statement by Abu Bakr Jassas who writes in *Ahkam Al-Qur'an*: 'It is permissible for any 'ghair mahram' to view the slave girl's hair,

arms, legs, chest and breasts' (*Ahkaam Al-Qur'an*, vol.3, p.390). Would anyone ask him if anything is left after his enumeration of these body parts?

Islam does not make any distinction between free women and slave women who were believers. It considers slaves and masters, men and women as equal. The basis of honour is one's piety. Adultery with free women or slave women would indeed be considered adultery. A society based on good morals cannot take a partisan view of it. To have a deeper idea about these fabricated reports, see Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Bani, *Jilbab Al-Mar'a Al-Muslimah*, Amman, 1413 hijra, pp. 88-94

<sup>120</sup> If one reads with an open mind the verse of slander in the light of the succeeding verses of surah Nur, it becomes clear that this verse too, like the succeeding verses, acts as a guide in some very complicated psychological and legal issues. Building the individual's character is an issue of crucial importance in a just society, and Allah revealed 'آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ' to enlighten on this so that the believers can work towards the establishment of a just society. Firstly, the penalty for adultery was determined, and with it severe punishment was awarded to those who slandered chaste women. About those who brought the charge of adultery against their wives but could not produce witnesses to verify it, the provision of separation (*liyan*) was brought in practice. After that when the marriage was finally terminated through it, none of the parties had the right to slander the other. The Qur'an considers it a reprehensible act for those who indulge in such mud-slinging. Through the verse – لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ مَا اكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ، وَالَّذِي تَوَلَّى كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ – the believers have been exhorted not to take interest in such slander, not to make it a subject of their discussion and not to participate directly or indirectly in its publicity. They should rather act with good grace, because in an Islamic society it is a heinous crime to slander anyone that merits grave penalty. The believers have been warned in the following lines that such slanderous gossip that might provide amusement to people is a serious crime in the eyes of Allah. That is why Allah's advice is – أَنْ تَعُودُوا – لِمِثْلِهِ أَبَدًا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ.

Quite aside from the consideration of the social and historical imperatives against which the Divine instructions were interpreted, it is not difficult even for even an ordinary reader of the Qur'an to understand that in any decent society there are some ethical norms to be met. Slander, libel, vilification, irresponsible gossip etc. have been declared reprehensible acts that would put men in jeopardy on the Day of Judgement. The believers should try their best to stay away from them and if they hear a slander they should not remain mute witnesses to it but refute or scotch it immediately. When the Qur'anic society was established during the Prophet's time, and when it will be restored in future, these verses would continue to defend men's rights on men. This is the most clear and transparent meaning of the verses that provide the background to the verse of slander, and they will continue to provide guidance to a society based on Islamic principles.

Those who have tried to harness historical facts in the interpretation of these quite clear verses, rather than concentrating on the crux of their meaning, they strayed too far away from it and kept wandering in the pathless wilderness of reports. The wide variety of tales recounted in

the books of reports and exegesis as a background to ayah *ifk* does not throw any light on the implication of the verse in question; rather, the reader gets engrossed in the maze of these fanciful stories and their points of convergences or divergences with one another and fails to concentrate on the Divine instructions. All attention is centred on the fact whether ayah *ifk* had Ayisha's personal life at its background or Fatima's exemption. If it is related to the controversy about Ayisha's chastity, then when did it take place? Who were the people who slandered her? Historians begin to expend all their energies on a comparative study of all these stories and thus exegetical literature comes into being. It is commonly supposed that these baseless footnotes (of exegetical literature) are filled with Qur'anic wisdom, whereas the truth is that rather than disentangling truth from fabrication and determining the historical imperatives with any measure of certainty, the study of these fanciful stories makes the issue even more complicated. As a consequence, even while reading the most clear verses, the reader's mind remains burdened with these stories and they interfere with his process of comprehension.

The general tendency among the exegetes has been to associate ayah *ifk* with the false rumour regarding Ayisha's chastity. According to this account, she had been left behind during a battle and this provided a handle to her enemies to spread wild rumours against her. Despite the mention of this event in reliable books of tradition, the details that have been provided in them cast aspersions on the absolute nature of Apostleship. That is why, despite the apparent reliability of the transmitters, we cannot take these events to be reliable. A second event in this cycle directs the needle of suspicion towards Maria Qibtiya. This event has been described in the 'Kitab Al-Tawba' in *Sahih Muslim* and constitutes another attack on the absolute nature of Apostleship. According to this report, Maria Qibtiya who had given birth to Ibrahim (the Prophet's son), was slandered by people who said that the new-born, in fact, was the son of Juraih Qibti. The report, as narrated in *Muslim*, has it that one day the Prophet had come to Ayisha along with the child. While talking about resemblance Ayisha is said to have asserted that she found no resemblance at all. Ayisha reports that the Prophet also came to know what other people were saying, and ordered Ali, 'Take this sword, find out Maria's cousin (Juraih) wherever he is, and kill him.' Fortunately, Ali discovered that Juraih was a eunuch which saved him from being killed. It is enough to falsify the claim made by this report in *Muslim* that it is just impossible for the Prophet to issue orders for anyone's murder in a huff. Firstly, the legal provision of providing the accused an opportunity to defend himself was not taken care of in this case. Secondly, in this fabricated incident, the character of Ali comes in much better light than that of the Prophet in terms of responsibility and mental poise. Then there are serious inconsistencies in the details of this account as one finds in *Muslim*, *Mustadrak Hakim* and other books. If in some reports Juraih was described as sitting on the embankment of a well and when Ali pulled off his trousers he found that he was a eunuch, some other reports show him seated on a date tree and trembling all over at the sight of Ali's sword; still other reports have it that when Ali found him he was standing

in a pool cooling his body, and when Ali pulled him out of the pool he found that the person charged with adultery with Maria Qibtiya was, in fact, a eunuch!

Muhammad bin Ishaq bin Ysaar who is known to have written the first biography of the Prophet, has mentioned Umm Salma who, according to the writer, came from Mecca to Madina in the company of Usman bin Talha, as the background to ayah ifk. It is said about Umm Salma that the mischief mongers had tried to slander her by spreading all kinds of rumour about her. In another report of *Sahih Muslim* (Kitab Al-ridha', Baab Al'amal Bil-haaq Al-Qaeif Al-Walad), Umm Ayman has been claimed to be at the background of the verse of slander. According to this account, some mischief mongers had slandered her by saying that her son, Osama was not from her husband, Zayd. It is said that one day when Zayd and Osama were lying down together at one place a physiognomer looked at their feet and said that their feet resembled one another indicating to their filial relationship. This statement by the physiognomer greatly pleased the Prophet. According to the report in *Muslim* the Prophet spoke about it to Ayisha too. In the words of Ayisha – ان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم دخل على مسروراً تبرق أسارير وجهه فقال ألم ترى أن مجزراً نظر أنفا إلى زيد بن حارثة واسامة بن زيد فقال إن بعض هذه الاقدام لمن بعض

Some reports have it that the verse of slander is actually about Ali. It is said that the Prophet had sent Ali, against Khalid bin Walid, to Yemen to bring back one fifth of the booty accruing from victories. Ali came to Yemen, and cohabited with a girl that had come as booty, to which Abdullah, the son of Buraida raised objections. In some reports dealing with this event it has been mentioned that on Ali's return, four of the Prophet's Companions complained to the Prophet against Ali for this reprehensible act. As described in *Tirmizi* that declared the report to be 'agreeably weak' (*hasan gharib*). After hearing the complaints the Prophet flew into a rage and said: 'Ali is from me and after me he will be the leader of the believers.' Reports narrating this event are available in many books of tradition. For example, we have already alluded to the report by Buraida in *Sahih Bukhari*, and the report in *Tirmizi*. Ibn Hajar Asqalani, the commentator of *Bukhari* (*Fathul Bari*, Kitab Al-Maghazi, Baab Ba'is 'Ala wa Khalid Ilal Yemen), does not consider the cohabitation by Ali as the reason for conflict, but puts whole emphasis on the fact that Buraida's complaint pertained not to the act of cohabitation per se, but to the fact that Ali cohabited with the girl when she was having her monthly periods, and did not wait till her periods were over. But those who have made themselves captives of exegetical reports would not find it difficult to find a way out of this impasse. Some of them speculated that the girl might not have attained puberty, she might not be having periods, or her periods might have terminated on that very day, or she might have been a virgin, in which case, according to some mujtahids, the rules (of adultery) did not apply.

These different and sometimes conflicting reports that are said to constitute the context of the revelation of ayah ifk do not only distract us from the core issue, but give us the impression of a society in Medina that is quite inconsistent with the Qur'anic concept of the society for the establishment of which he was sent as the Prophet. The Qur'an claims that the blessings of the

Revelation and the personality of the Prophet combined to produce an atmosphere of living together amicably *فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ فُلُوبِكُمْ*. Muhammad and those around him became a blessing for one another. As opposed to this, these reports about the verse of slander present such conflicting accounts that it seems that slandering and scandal mongering were the order of the day at Medina. The atmosphere appears to be so bad that the Prophet of the day has to feel reassured by the pronouncements of a physiognomer. Let alone the level of morality among the common people, a monstrous charge is brought against an honourable and self-respecting person from the Prophet's own family like Ali that he showed unholy haste in cohabiting with a girl that came as a booty. Those who believe this report about Ali that he used to have frequent seminal discharge (even without intercourse), and because of this he had approached the Prophet for a solution of this problem (as it is recorded in the 'Kitab Al-Taharah' of *Bukhari*) would not find it difficult to believe in this misdemeanour by Ali. However, those who believe the society at Medina to have been the practical embodiment of the Qur'anic concept of society will find it impossible to believe in such false accounts, as it involves the honour of the Prophet as well as the honour of one of his most trusted and esteemed companions. What is needed is that rather than choosing some reports regarding the circumstances of revelation according to our preference we should totally dismiss all of them and then with our mind like a clean slate we should try to read the Revelation as the eternal truth. Only then shall we be able to save ourselves from the deleterious effect of the false propaganda whose target is not only the proper understanding of the Qur'an but also the character of the Prophet himself.

<sup>121</sup> This report runs as follows: 'لما قام قائمنا رد إليه الحميراء حتى يجلدوها الحد ينتقمه لابنته مجد' *Basair Al-Darjaat*, p. 213; also see Mulla Baqar Majlisi, *Haqq Al-Yeqin*, part II, Tehran, p. 347 that contains the following statement:

ابن بابويه در علل الشرائع روایت کرده است از حضرت امام باقر علیه السلام که چون قائم ما ظاهر شود، عايشه را زنده کند، تا براوحد بزند وانتقام فاطمه را از او بکشد

<sup>122</sup> see, *Jalalain*, pp.755-56; *Qurtabi*, vol.19-20, pp.172-73; *Kashshaf*, vol.4, pp.822-24; *Raazi*, vols. 31-32, pp. 173-74; *Tafhim Al-Qur'an*, vol.6, pp.546-562

## SECTION IV

<sup>1</sup> See, *Abu Dawood*, Chapter, 'Salat Al-Lail'.

<sup>2</sup> See, *Usool Al-Fiqh* by Khudri, p.257; *Husool Al-Mamool*, p.22; *Taujih Al Nazr* by Jazairi, p.3; *Ta'rifat* by Jurjani, p.82; *Nuzhat Al-Nazar Al-Khatir Al-Aa'tir*, p. 236, *Al-Ahkaam* by Ibn Hazm, vol.2, p.6; *Risala Usool by Zain al-Deen Al-Halabi*, p.16, 808 hijra

<sup>3</sup> See, *Noor al-Anwar*, p.173

<sup>4</sup> Hasan Ahmad Khatib, *Fiqh al-Islam*, Karachi, 1961, p.69

<sup>5</sup> For example, Abul Ala Maududi

<sup>6</sup> Those who are in favour of looking at the Prophet not only in terms of Apostleship but also of a human being, present as evidence of their stance the event in which Baraira stuck to her decision



of separating from her husband Mughees, despite the Prophet's advice to the contrary. It is said that Baraira had asked him: O Prophet of Allah, is the order you are giving me as the Prophet or in your individual capacity? When the Prophet replied that it was in his individual capacity, Baraira decided to stick to her own position. The reports have it that the Prophet withdrew his advice without any ill-feeling.

<sup>7</sup> See, *Al-Qaol Al-Ma'mool fi Fan Al-Usool*, p.78; *Qawaid Al-Usool* by Safi al-Din Al-Hanbali, 684 hijra, p.91; Ibid. *Muslim Al-Saboot*, vol.2, p.66

<sup>8</sup> The Shafeites present the following reports in support of their stance. Basra, daughter of Safwan, narrated – إنما سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يأمر بالوضوء من مس الفرج –

Another report on this runs as follows: حدثنا يونس قال إن ابن وهب قال حدثني سعيد بن عبدالرحمن عن هشام بن عروة عن أبيه عن بسرة عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال إذا مس أحدكم ذكره فلا يصلين حتى يتوضأ.

For a detailed discussion on this issue, see, Imam Abu Jafar Tahawi (d.321 hijra), *Shar'h Mani Al-aathar*, vol.I, p.58

<sup>9</sup> The Hanafites present the following Hadith in support of their stance: حدثنا مجد بن خزيمة قال حدثنا حجاج قال حدثنا ملازم عن عبد الله بن بدر عن قيس بن طلق عن أبيه عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم انه سأله رجل فقال يا نبي الله ما ترى في مس الرجل ذكره بعد ما توضأ فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم هل هذا لا بضعة منك أو مضحة منك.

<sup>10</sup> In matters of critiquing Hadiths and the endorsement or refutation of *rijal*, the Jurisprudents and the traditionists belonging to different schools have commonly accused one another of orthodoxy and inflexibility. On the issue of the male genital organ touching the female one (*masse zakar*), Bahaiqi's statement that exegetical scholarship was not Imam Tahawi's forte point to the tension that existed between the Hanafites and the Shafeiites. The Hanafites believe that Bahaiqi, despite his profound scholarship, displays his narrowness of mind regarding the Hanafite School; they also accuse him of partisanship in his evaluation of the major Sunnah (*sunan kubra*). They said that he declared the reports compiled by the Hanafites as 'feeble' while those compiled by the Shafeiites received his instant approval and appreciation.

See, Shaikh Alauddin Ali bin Othman Al-Marooof bi Ibn Al-Turkmani's (d.750 hijra) book, *Al-Jawahir Al-Hanfi fi al-Rad Ala al-Bahaiqi* where the author has pointed out Bahaiqi's partiality towards his own school.

<sup>11</sup> Imam Tahawi has recorded, with his own validation, the following report from Abu Huraira: إني سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول توضؤا مما مست النار

عن أبي هريرة أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أكل من ثور فطة فتوضأ ثم أكل بعده كتفا فصلى ولم يتوضأ

<sup>13</sup> Imam Tahawi has recorded, with his own validation, this report from Abu Huraira. See, Imam Jafar Tahawi, *Shar'h Mani Al-aathar*, vol.I, p.26

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., quoted by Tahawi

<sup>15</sup> The efforts undertaken by Tahawi to juxtapose and harmonise (*tatbeeq*) the two conflicting Hadiths related to ablution (*wudu*) have, instead of resolving the issue, have further complicated

it. As we have already pointed out, according to a report narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet was alleged to have said: لا صلوة لمن لا وضوء له ولا وضوء لمن لم يذكر اسم الله عليه i.e., as there can be no prayer without ablution, in the same way, ablution cannot be effected without *bismillah*. However, the second report, recorded through the exiles in Qanfadh, refutes this idea. According to this report, the Prophet was doing ablution because of which he delayed to respond to the greetings of someone, and then said, 'I do not like to utter Allah's name without ablution. To undertake *tatbeeq* of these two Hadiths Tahawi took recourse to two more Hadiths. He remarks: as the Prophet says, the person who returns one or two morsels, or one or two date fruits is not a destitute (*miskin*); or, the Prophet's assertion that that person is not a Muslim who eats to his heart's content while his neighbour goes starving. Likewise, in the statement – لا صلوة لمن لا وضوء له – there is no total denial of *wudu*, but one finds the concept of *wudu* in its complete form. As the above description of a Muslim or *wudu* is not exclusive, in the same way, the *wudu* will be effected without *bismillah*, but it would not be the ideal or perfect *wudu*. Ostensibly, this attempt at co-relating the Hadiths seems to have removed the apparent contradiction between the two Hadiths, but if one takes a close look, one finds that this kind of interpretations further complicated the problem. The Hadith says – as the *salah* cannot be effected without *wudu*, similarly, the *wudu* cannot be effected without *bismillah*. If one accepts the argument that without *bismillah*, *wudu* cannot be perfect, one can extend this argument further to derive the concept of a weak, undesirable or imperfect *salah* as well, whereas there are no two opinions in the community of Muslims about the fact that *salah* cannot be performed without *wudu*, and that *bismillah* is not essential for *wudu*. One can attempt to reconcile irreconcilable Hadiths and remove internal contradictions in them through irrelevant examples and specious comparisons, but that will not remove the contradiction between history and Sunnah.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Tamanna Imadi, *Ejaz Al-Qur'an wa Ikhtilaf Qir'at*, Karachi, 1414 hijra, p.313

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *Sirat Bukhari*, vol.2, p.208, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> History, of whichever period, by its very definition, and whatever means are adopted for its preservation, cannot claim to be fully comprehensive or exhaustive. More specifically, to record every little detail of the quotidian, spreading over a period of 23 years, is beyond the ken of any kind of history. This is the reason why the body of Jurisprudence formulated on the basis of sayings and practices could not acquire a definitive status. The doubt always remained that if a particular Hadith, situation-report or the practices of the Prophet's Companions had reached the traditionists, then the issue concerned would have assumed entirely new dimensions, and the traditionists would have been forced to look at it from fresh angles. The complaints of the traditionists against the judges that they (the jurists) did not have all the evidence from the sayings and practices of the Prophet in their hands and that if they had been aware of all these, they might have revised many of their decisions. The same can be said about the exegetical jurists. Imam Bukhari, in some way, could be said to have been among the founders of the exegetical jurisprudence and he should be called the most forceful advocate of the stance taken by Shafei.

Even in his case, the process of inference (*istinbat*) that is seen as a result of the influence of different Hadiths, despite its recourse to deep scholarship, cannot be said to be the last word in exegetical jurisprudence. Even though in his case one finds a strong trend of gathering insights from different reports which have a bearing on a particular issue that may leave one with the impression that he has extracted the essence of all of them. However, the process also leaves one with the impression that just as some reports, along with their specific contexts, helped him arrive at a particular decision, in the same way, if he had failed to access some of these reports or accessed some specious or fabricated ones, then the direction of his inference could have been different. To illustrate the point, we present here an example from *Bukhari*. On the issue of women's presence in the mosque, Bukhari has presented three Hadiths in a particular order. باب هل يجب على من لم يشهد الجمعة غسل من النساء والصبيان قال ابن عمر إنما الغسل على من تجب عليه الجمعة i.e., whether a bath is obligatory for those who do not go for the Friday prayer such as women, children etc.? the following Hadith occurs at the end of this chapter: عن عمر قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لا تمنعوا إماء الله مساجد الله i.e., 'Do not stop women from coming to the mosque'. In the same chapter, before the above Hadith, another Hadith has been recorded on the authority of Omer, as follows: إنذونا للنساء بالليل إلى المساجد From the order in which Bukhari has presented these three Hadiths, or from their cumulative impact, the traditionist jurists have drawn the following conclusions: first, women cannot be stopped from visiting the mosque at night, although there is justification to stop them from going there during daytime. Secondly, as the Friday prayer is held at noon, women have nothing to do with it. Thirdly, because of the instruction – إنما الغسل على من تجب عليه الجمعة, the bath prior to the Friday prayer is not mandatory for women. Now, these three conclusions, drawn from the three Hadiths, could not have been drawn if one of the Hadiths, say for instance – لا تمنعوا إماء الله مساجد الله وأذنوا للنساء بالمساجد – were not accessible. In such a case, the instructions regarding the Friday prayer or Friday bath would have been certainly different. As one Hadith influences another, one piece of information coming through history transforms the complexion of another. Thus, as one cannot say with certainty whether all the information relating to the sayings and practices of the Prophet is accessible to us, the jurisprudence built merely on the utterances and practices (of the Prophet) will always leave us with a sense of incompleteness and inadequacy. Moreover, as the traditionist jurists never claim to have accessed or exhausted all reports, rather, because of their rigorous standard and the attitude of caution, they reject the reports and practices that are suspect, and precisely because of this reason, the traditionist jurisprudence can never be conclusive. We will always have the feeling that whenever some rare Hadith comes to light, it might radically change our way of thinking on a particular issue. As it can be said about Imam Abu Hanifa that if he were in the possession of the *Sehah Sitta*, he would have revised many of his decisions; similarly, it can be said that if the traditionist jurists had the earlier collections of the followers of the Prophet's Companions in their hands, and if we had in our possession all the rare compilations done by the latter-day traditionists, they would certainly have left their impact on our juristic way of thinking. Jurisprudence, whether

formulated on the basis of practices or the decisions of earlier people (*aara al-rijal*) will remain, in the final analysis, inconclusive.

<sup>19</sup> *Sirat Bukhari*, vol.2, p.173, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> *Tafseer Fathul Bayaan*, vol.5, p.234, where the commentary of the verse – لتبين للناس ما نزل إليهم – وبيان الكتاب يطلب من السنة والمبين لذلك المجمل هو الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم ولهذا قيل متى وقع تعارض بين القرآن والحديث وجب تقديم الحديث لأن القرآن مجمل والحديث مبين بدلالة هذه الآية والمبين مقدم على المجمل. That is to say, whenever there is an apparent conflict between the Qur'an and Hadith, it is mandatory to follow Hadith.

<sup>21</sup> The report – لا وصية لوارث – has been recorded from three different sources in the four books of *Sehah*, for example, *Abu Dawood*, *Tirmizi*, *Nasei* and *Ibn Maja*. The primary reporters are Anas bin Malik, Abu Imama Al-Bahli and Amr bin Kharjah. A comparative study of these versions creates doubt about the authenticity of this Hadith. As a matter of fact, Bukhari's chapter heading of the same name has played a crucial role in ensuring the Hadith of *la wasiya li waris* such a wide reputation. It is another matter that the chapter went blank, as he did not find any reliable Hadith on this theme. Even though he has recorded a saying by Ibn Abbas under this heading, it does not fit the heading of لا وصية لوارث. It may be surmised that this axiom was widely publicised during the period of Bukhari; rather, it seems plausible to conjecture that it had gained acceptability which actuated Bukhari to use it for an independent chapter heading and then look for relevant Hadiths to suit this heading. However, the fact that the chapter remained blank point to the fact that Bukhari could not be sure about the authenticity of the available reports on the issue or their chain of narrators. That is why *Sahih Bukhari* is devoid of any of the versions of لا وصية لوارث found in some other books of *Sehah Sitta*. The saying by Ibn Abbas recorded in *Bukhari* does not concern itself directly with the theme of لا وصية لوارث, and does not say anything about its abrogation either. Rather, it addresses itself to some such issues because of which we cannot take it as a direct comment on لا وصية لوارث. The original report recorded by Bukhari is as follows: باب لا وصية لوارث، حدثنا محمد بن يوسف عن ورقاء عن ابن نجيح عن عطاء عن ابن عباس قال كان المال للولد وكانت الوصية للوالدين فنسخ الله من ذلك ما أحب فجعل للذكر مثل حظ الأنثيين فجعل للأبوين لكل واحد منهما السدس وجعل للمرأة الثمن والربع وللزوج الشطر والربع. That is, the property first belonged to the sons and the inheritance for parents. Then Allah abrogated it the way He willed. Among the offspring, the male members will inherit twice that of the female members, and among the rest, everyone will inherit one sixth, and for the wife one-eighth and one-fourth, and for the husband, half and one-fourth. Now, reflect on this – the Qur'an characterises the inheritance as coming from the parents and close relatives (للوالدين والأقربين), whereas according to Ibn Abbas' report the property first belonged to the sons and the inheritance for the parents. We do not know whether Ibn Abbas' report points to the age to jahiliya or the Qur'anic verse. The attention of some scholars has been drawn by this report to ancient history of the Arabs when daughters did not inherit anything from the parents' property.

As for the other reports in *Sehah Sitta* the one by Amr bin Kharja recorded in *Ibn Maja* runs as follows: إن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم خطبهم وهو على راحلته وان راحلته لتقصع بجرتها وان لغامها ليسيل بين كتفي. قال إن الله

قسم لكل وارث نصيبه من الميراث فلا يجوز لوارث وصية، الولد للفراش وللعاهر الحجر ومن ادعى إلى غير أبيه أو تولى غير مواليه فعليه لعنة الله والملائكة والناس أجمعين لا يقبل منه صرف ولا عدل أو قال عدل ولا صرف.

The same report is recorded in *Tirmizi* as follows: 'إن النبي خطب على ناقته وأنا تحت جرابها وهي تقصع بجرتها وان': and in the *Nasei* as follows: 'انه شهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يخطب الناس على راحلته وإنما لتقصع لجرتها وان لعابها ليسيل فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في خطبة إن الله قد قسم لكل إنسان قسمته من الميراث فلا يجوز لوارث وصية. حدثنا احمد بن مجد المروزي حدثني علي بن حسين بن واقد عن أبيه عن يزيد النوي عن عكرمة عن ابن عباس إن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةَ لِلْأَوْلَادِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ فكانت الوصية كذلك حتى نسختها آية الميراث.

Besides all these, there is a brief report by Abu Imama Al-Bahli which runs as follows: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول في خطبته عام حجة الوداع إن الله قد أعطى كل ذي حق حقه فلا وصية لوارث. A comprehensive study of all these reports would suggest the following: First, it is not clear whether the address in which the Prophet talked about – إن الله قد أعطى كل ذي حق حقه فلا وصية لوارث – was the last Haj address of the Prophet (*hajjatul al-wida*) or some other address in the same year. Secondly, for the heirs, stopping the will and saying that Allah has given all the claimants their due share, and that no human initiative is required in this regard is, in fact, borrowed from Qadiriya school of thought. Some of the reporters of this Hadith have been known for their leanings towards Qadiriya way of thinking. Thirdly, the statement on the authority of Amr bin Kharja and Anas bin Malik that the Prophet had said this when he (the reporter) was standing beneath the she-camel and her saliva was dripping down on him would persuade one to believe that the narrator has paid attention to the smallest details. However, when one reads all the reports together it becomes difficult to decide whether the saliva of the she-camel was falling on Amr bin Kharja or Anas bin Malik, because both of them record the same thing in their reports. These are the defects or inconsistencies that are discernible in the circumstances of these reports. As for the narrators in the chain, first, in the report by Amr bin Kharja, Shahar bin Haushab Al-Shaami was extremely unreliable and was believed to have been accused of stealing. Qatadah was known both for his tendency to create confusion or ambiguity about transmitters (*tadlis*) and his Qadiriya way of thinking. Similarly, in the other version, Sa'id bin Sa'id and Ismail bin Ayash were not considered reliable by the scholars of traditions. Alqama, Ibn Khuzaima, Abdullah Mubarak and others held a very low opinion of Ayash. In the report by Anas, the presence of Hisham bin Ammar, besides Sa'id bin Sa'id, is proof enough for the report being declared feeble. Imam Hanbal used to say that whoever had performed *salah* behind Hisham, he should perform his *salah* over again. These opinions about the above reporters were expressed by the scholars of traditions who were in favour of reading the Sunnah as the sacred history. When their own historical standard serves as the proof for the feebleness of the reports, there is no reason why they should be accepted as 'continuous' (*mutawatir*) merely on the strength of their wide publicity and allow them to stand in the way of proper understanding of the Qur'anic revelation.

<sup>22</sup> See the commentary on the verse in *Tabari* and *Qurtabi*.

<sup>23</sup> It is said that on the issue of *kilala*, Omer sought the Prophet's opinion so many times that, in the words of Shibli Nomani, the Prophet was fed up with his constant pestering and had said, 'O Omer, the concluding verse of Surah *Nisa* will satisfy you.' But, according to reports, even after this clarification by the Prophet Omer remained uncertain about the inheritance of grand children till the end of his life. According to Qistilani, the interpreter of *Bukhari*, Omer had had about a hundred formulations regarding the issue, but could not reach a conclusive view till his death. How could he have done so when a sagacious person like Abu Bakr, the closest friend of the Prophet, according to these reporters, used to say often – 'I wish I had written down the Prophet's views on three issues – *kilala*, inheritance on grandfather's property and some kinds of interest.' According to these fabricated reports, that were brought to the fore to cast doubts on the Prophet's apostleship, Omer had left the world with the yearning that if the Prophet had resolved the three issues – the Caliphate, *kilala* and interest – for him before he departed from the world, it would have been dearer to him than the whole world and whatever it contained.

See, Shibli Nomani, *Al-Farooq*, Azamgarh, 1331 hijra, pp. 214-215.

<sup>24</sup> See, 'Kitab Al-Manasik', *Bukhari*

<sup>25</sup> See, the chapter on dry ablution (*tayammum*), 'Kitab Al-Haid', *Sahih Muslim*

<sup>26</sup> See, Shah Waliullah, *Azala Al-Hunafa*

<sup>27</sup> 'Kitab Al-Haid', *Sahih Muslim*, p.458

<sup>28</sup> The text of the Hadith in *Nasei* runs as follows: عن الفاروق أن رجلاً أجنب فلم يصل فأتى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فذكر ذلك له فقال أصبت فأجنب رجل آخر فتيمم وصلى فأناه فقال له نحوا مما قال للآخر يعني أصبت

<sup>29</sup> The alleged disagreement among the Prophet's Companions regarding dry ablution have been taken by our traditionists so seriously that they have reached extreme limits in their interpretation of them. For instance, about the supposed disagreement between Omer and Ammar, Shah Waliullah reached the conclusion that when the Prophet found Omer and Ammar disagreeing with each other in their interpretation of two verses from the Qur'an, viz., from the Surah Maeda and Surah Nisa, he left them to their own devices. In the words of Shah Waliullah: فصوب كلا التأويلين (Azala Al-Khafa, vol.2, p.89) وترك كل مؤول على تأويله

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Hazm has touched upon many such controversial issues in his *Ahkaam*, vol. 2. If one takes a close look at them one realises how much difference there was between the 'continuous' Sunnah of Medina and the oral Sunnah (*sunnat-e qaoli*) gathered by Imam Malik.

<sup>31</sup> The original report is as follows: Osama bin Zaid narrates – سألت القاسم بن مجد عن القراءة خلف الإمام فيما – لم تجهر فيه فقال إن قرأت فلك في رجال من أصحاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أسوة وإذا لم تقر فلك في رجال من أصحاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أسوة (*Jami' Bayan Al-ilm*, vol. 2, p. 80).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See, *Ahkaam Al-Qur'an Al-Jassas* vol. I, p.204

<sup>34</sup> Shah Waliullah, in his book *Eqd al-Jeed*, has opined that the differences between the opinions of the mujtahids are equally reliable, because all of them are simultaneously correct. To support his view, he has adduced the name of many predecessors who, according to him, were supporters of

this view. In *Eqd al-Jeed*, Waliullah further asserts that the majority of the interlocutors (*mutakallimeen*) would fall in this category, whether they are Asherites or Mu'tazelites. See, *Eqd al-Jeed*, pp. 106-108, op. cit

<sup>35</sup> Allusion to this Hadith has been made earlier. Besides, we have undertaken a detailed discussion in the note about its 'feebleness'. This report is being reproduced here in two versions:

- (1) عن المقدم بن معدي كرب قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: ألا إني أوتيت القرآن ومثله معه ألا يوشك رجل شبعان على أريكته يقول عليكم بهذا القرآن فما وجدتم فيه من حلال فأحلوه وما وجدتم فيه من حرام فحرموه ان ما حرم رسول الله كما حرم الله ألا لا يحل لكم الحمار الأهلي ولا كل ذي ناب من السباع (narrated in *Abu Dawood, Al-Darimi and Ibn Maaja*)
- (2) عن العرياض بن سارية قال: قام رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال: أيحسب أحدكم متكئا على أريكته يظن إن الله لم يحرم شيئا إلا ما في هذا القرآن الا واني والله قد أمرت ووعظت ونهيت عن أشياء إنها لمثل القرآن أو أكثر (narrated in *Abu Dawood*)

<sup>36</sup> *Azala Al-Khafa*, vol.2, p.136

<sup>37</sup> Before the emergence of *Sehah Sitta* and their subsequent canonization, the attitude of Muslims towards history was critical and not reverential. The sayings and reports did not enjoy the same status as they later acquired after the compilation of the *sahihain* and the wrong impression created by the term *sehah sitta*. It was possible for the scholars of the past to assess any utterance or report attributed to the Prophet on the crucible of the Revelation, instead of merely depending on the evidence of reporters. This is the reason why a contemporary traditionist like Imam Malik, who is basically among the founders of the art of Hadith, and who gives so much importance to Sunnah that for him the practices of the people of Medina serve as evidence or proof, does not have any qualms about rejecting the reports that came into conflict with the basic framework of the Qur'an. There are many such instances in the Malikite jurisprudence where Imam Malik found the practices of the people of Medina coming in conflict with the tenets of the Qur'an and not amenable to the process of *qaeda dafa harj* that he practised. Shatibi has thrown considerable light on this in his detailed discussion in *Al-Muafiqaat*. He points out how Ayisha bin Abbas and Omer bin Al-Khattab used to reject reports summarily on the ground that they were in conflict with the Qur'anic view of life. This trend of critiquing history and practices remained in vogue up until the coming of Shafei on the scene. It is said that Abu Hanifa could escape the stranglehold of reports and practices because, firstly, he was located in Kufa, far away from Medina, and secondly, he used to accord greater importance to directly accessing the Revelation than to reports. And that is why he was counted among those who could give fair judgement on issues. Of course, the reason why a traditionist like Imam Malik and a scholar of the Prophet's life at Medina, despite the presence of many reports around him, could adopt a pluralistic view on jurisprudence is none other than the fact that history had not yet attained a sacred status. Many such instances can be put forward to demonstrate that the Malekite jurisprudence, despite the presence of reports, incorporates different stances. For instance, it has been recorded in Hadith that if a dog licks an utensil it should be washed in water seven times. Malik opines – when it is

permissible to eat a game hunted by a dog, it does not stand to reason why its saliva should be considered reprehensible (*makrooh*), and as for this Hadith, I cannot vouch for its truth. Similarly, the Hadith that if a person dies in a condition when fasting (*saum*) is obligatory for him, then his sons should fast on his behalf. To counter this Hadith, Imam Malik puts forward the following Qur'anic verses: وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ... and وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ

(Many such instances can be found in Shatibi's *Al-Muafiqaat*, see, *Al-Muafiqaat*, vol.3, p.10

<sup>38</sup> In *Tawzih-o-Talwih*, Allama Taftazani has opined that this Hadith has been fabricated by heretics. According to him, this Hadith runs counter to the Qur'anic verse – وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا although there is nothing in this Hadith to indicate that it was fabricated or that it was made up by the enemies of Islam. To juxtapose any Hadith beside the Qur'an and to judge it on the crucible of the Qur'anic commandments and values before accepting it would only mean recognising the primacy and definitiveness of the Qur'an. Apparently, there seems to be no reason why the same method should be considered anti-Qur'an and anti-Hadith. However, analysing and critiquing history and judging it on the crucible of the Qur'anic values is certainly an unwelcome thought for those who had begun to consider history as the immortal source of *wahi ghair matlu*.

The scholars have generally declared the above Hadith to be against the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Abdur Rahman Mahdi also continued to hold the view that this Hadith was fabricated by the Schismatics (Khawarij) and the heretics. The scholars of traditions are, by and large, in consensus with him. However, the view expressed by Abdur Rahman Mahdi cannot be endorsed on purely scholarly grounds. Firstly, the Schismatics and the heretics represent two different, even contradictory, trends. The former are known for their inflexible pursuit of truth and their outspoken stances while the latter are notorious for their false beliefs and practices. It is difficult to establish that members belonging to these two conflicting ideologies have fabricated the same Hadith, and it would serve their purposes equally well. At best, one can say that this Hadith is suited to the inflexible attitude of the Schismatics, but this cannot serve as the reason to declare the Hadith to be feeble, as even the severest critic of the Schismatists would vow for their truthfulness. In the words of Imam Dawood, 'Among the misguided sects, the most reliable Hadiths were reported by the Schismatists.' Ibn Taimiyah says, 'These people never tell lies intentionally; rather, they are known for their boldness and loyalty to truth.' The general view about them is that they have always reported Hadiths truthfully. (*Minhaj Al-Sunnah*, vol.3, p.31). How did the scholars of traditions come to the conclusion that a Hadith that plays such a key role in determining the genuine Hadiths on reports and practices, and that, on principle, cannot be said to be in conflict with the Revelation and its understanding and interpretation, to have been fabricated by the Schismatists and the heretics? And how did the author of *Aun Al-Ma'bud* come to decide that this Hadith is incorrect and baseless (*Aun Al-Ma'bud*, 339/4), and how did Zakariya Saji, through Yahya bin Mu'een and Fitna, through Khattabi (in *Tazkarah Al-Mausuf*) declare that this Hadith was, in fact, fabricated by heretics?



<sup>39</sup> The excess of devotion shown by some scholars towards the *Sahihain* led to the general impression that there is no further scope for discussion in them. Ibn Al-salah, Ibn Kathir, Shah Waliullah and others are in favor of this view. Shah Waliullah, in fact, declares in the language of edicts: أم الصحيحان فقد اتفق المحدثون على أن جميع ما فيهما من المتصل المرفوع صحيح بالقطع وإنهما متواتران إلى مصنفهما: i.e., whoever wants to recompile or edit these two is indeed an unfortunate fellow and outside the pale of Islam. (*Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, vol. I, p.134). This kind of language, best suited to edicts, gets more strident in case of the latter-day scholars, as it can be found in *Fatwa Rasheediya*: 'In the books of *Sehah Sitta* are preserved the Prophet's Hadiths, and their compilers, among whom are Prophet's Companions and others, who are profound scholars and venerable men of letters. These compilations enjoy the consensus of the community and they are blessed by Allah. Anyone who calls them bad or mere compilations abuses, as it were, the Prophet himself. He is a heretic, rather a kafir, and deserves to be cursed by the Lord.' (*Fatawa Rasheediya*, vol.2, p.13)

<sup>40</sup> For details, see, *Mahalli and Ahkaam fi Usool Al-Ahkaam* by Ibn Hazm and *E'lam Al-Muaqqein* and Shaikh al-Islam's book *Madhab Ahl-al-Medina*

<sup>41</sup> See Preface to the *Sahih Muslim*, tr. Wahiduzzaman, vol.I, p.11

<sup>42</sup> One of the reasons for this was probably to cut down the chain of reporters as much as possible. The second reason was the hypothesis of the traditionists that a particular reporter was not considered equally reliable by all in all cases. For example, Warqa bin Omer Yashkari was considered reliable by some, while in the report by Mansur bin Al-Mo'tamar, Bukhari did not consider him reliable. In the same way, despite the apparent consensus on the reliability of Wazzah bin Abdullah, in the report by Qatadah, Bukhari did not consider him reliable. The same is true of Walid bin Muslim of Damascus. His reports, attributed to Imam Malik, were not reliable to Bukhari. If, on the one hand, all these point to the rigorous standard followed by Bukhari and strengthens the belief that in putting together his *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* Bukhari had undertaken a comprehensive study of the reports coming through various sources and accepted only those that fulfilled the rigorous condition of making the chain shortest and the most compact. On the other hand, the question still remains as to how one can truly determine the degree of authenticity or otherwise of a reporter that cannot be considered reliable because of reporting through some particular person and who, for some reason, could not be given precedence to some other chain?

<sup>43</sup> The compilers of *Sehah Sitta* among whom Bukhari and Muslim are particularly known for their erudition and editing skills were, no doubt, counted among the profound scholars and truly pious individuals of the time. Also, they must have been aware of the fact that in attempting to put together the Prophet's traditions they had taken upon themselves an onerous and delicate responsibility. However, despite this awareness, they were not free from human failings. They were influenced by the issues of their time, the prevailing political circumstances, mutual rivalry, personal likes and dislikes etc. in the same way as human failings are seen to operate even in the

most pious environment. Nevertheless, those who consider *Sehah Sitta* as emanating from Allah are not sensitive to this aspect of human weakness in this seemingly grand task undertaken by venerable and great individuals. It is this servile and uncritical attitude that stands in the way of deriving helpful insights from this valuable treasure. As a result, the *Sehah Sitta* or other collections of Hadiths have been given the same status in Islamic thinking as the Israelites have given to Talmud.

It is said that on the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an, the disagreement between Imam Muhammad bin Yahya, Al-Zahbi and Bukhari reached such a stage that the whole atmosphere of Nishapur became charged with their rivalry and enmity, and the entire populace of the city – both the elite and the commoners – sided with the one or the other. At that point, Imam Muslim who was a student of both, joined his strength with Bukhari and turned against Muhammad bin Yahya. His opposition to his former teacher grew so strong that he put the entire stock of the Hadiths that he learnt and recorded from him on the backs of camels and got it sent back to him. It was certainly a declaration of the fact that he was not only disowning him as his teacher and mentor, but also of the fact that all that he had learnt from him had lost credibility in his eyes. One of the reasons for such extreme response might have been that in a situation of such intense hostility between two scholars, loyalty to one demanded that the student should totally disown the other. Otherwise, if it was a question of mere scholarly or ideological disagreement, it would not have come down to the level of returning the entire stock of Hadiths learnt and recorded from a reputed scholar over the years. Whatever the case may be, this incident at least demonstrates the fact that the compilers of *Sehah Sitta*, despite the profundity of their learning, were, after all, human beings. Hence, there is no reason why their writings and compilations should be read as emanating from Allah, and not as a body of writing that should be seen in their historical and scholarly perspectives. ('Introduction', *Fathul Bari*)

<sup>44</sup> It should be kept in mind that till after the 5<sup>th</sup> century hijra, only five books used to be included among the basic texts of *Sehah*. However, for the first time, Hafiz Abul Fazal Muhammad bin Tahir Muqaddasi (d. 507 hijra), in his book *Sharoot Al-Aimma Al-Sunnah*, included *Ibn Maja* among the basic books of the *Sehah*, taking the tally up to six. Thereafter, another contemporary traditionist, Zarrin bin Muavia Maliki (d.550 hijra), in his book, *Al-Tajrid lil-Sehah wal-Sunan* did not include *Ibn Maja* among the *Sehah*. Instead, he included *Muatta Imam Malik* and took the tally of the *Sehah* up to six. Thus, the issue still remained unresolved as to which books should be included among the *Sehah*. Meanwhile, the term, *sehah sitta* became so widely known that, without clearly determining the books, they (the books of *Sehah Sitta*) were recognised as the most authentic source of the Sunnah. A famous traditionist of the 8<sup>th</sup> century hijra, Hafiz Salahuddin Khalil (d.761 hijra) expressed the view that it was preferable to include *Darmi* in place of *Ibn Maja* among the books of *Sehah Sitta* as this particular text (*Darmi*) contained lesser numbers of feeble and dubious reports than the other one, i.e., *Ibn Maja*, and because in terms of technique and method, *Darmi*'s compilation is much better than that of *Ibn Maja*. But this view

was not accepted by too many and the texts of *Sehah Sitta* canonized by the earlier scholars were not displaced from their status.

<sup>45</sup> Neither Revelation nor history corroborates the fact that the Prophet's Companions had compiled any collection of the Prophet's sayings and practices. There is no plausible reason why the community that preserved the version of the Qur'an that was prepared in the Othmanic period on the basis of which we can, even at this hour, verify the immutability and inviolability of the Qur'anic Text, should not preserve their collections of Hadiths, in however imperfect form, if they had been prepared at all.

After the Qur'anic verse – يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَبَشِيرَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ فِي الضُّلُومِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ. قُلْ – (Yunus:57-58), and the clear instruction of the Prophet – لا تكتبوا عني – we cannot expect any of the Prophet's Companions to have violated this commandment.

<sup>46</sup> In *Kashaf Bazdawi*, the famous book on the principles of jurisprudence, it is written that those reports that were once regarded as *khbr ahhad* or single-transmitter traditions are now called *khbar mashhoor* i.e. the acceptable traditions; as the scholars of the first and the second century hijra arrived at a consensus about them. As for the succeeding period, the author of *Kashshaf* says: والاعتبار للاشتهار في القرن الثاني والثالث ولا عبرة للاشتهار في القرون التي بعد القرون الثلاثة i.e., the reports that became *mashhoor* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century hijra (the period of the followers of the Prophet's Companions and their followers, i.e., *tabein* and *tabe-tabein*) will be considered as such. However, those (reports) attaining 'shuhrah' after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century hijra will not enjoy the same reliability (*Kashshaf*, vol.2, p.369).

<sup>47</sup> The original text of Shah Waliullah's statement runs as follows:

ومثال آخر روي الشيخان انه كان من مذهب عمر بن خطاب إن التيمم لا يجوز للجنب الذي لا يجد ماء فروي عنده عمار انه كان مع الرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في سفر فتمسح في التراب فذكر ذلك للرسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم إنما كان يكفيك أن تفعل هكذا وضرب بيده الأرض فمسح بهما وجهه ويده فلم يقبل عمرو لم ينهض عنده حجة لقادح خفي رآه فيه حتى استفاض الحديث في الطبقة الثانية من طرق كثيرة واضمحل وهم القادح فأخذوا به.

(*Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, vol.I, p.113)

The concept of dry ablution is corroborated by the Book and the consensus of the community. Most of the Islamic scholars believe that in dry ablution, two strokes (touching the dry earth with hand) are essential – one for smearing the face and the other for the hands up to the elbow. The same has been reported by Ali bin Abi Talib, Abdullah bin Omer, Hasan Basari, Salim, Sufian Thawri, Malik, Abu Hanifa and so on. However, one group of scholars opine that for dry ablution just one stroke is enough after which one should smear one's face and the two palms. This is endorsed by Ata Makhul, Auzai', Ahmad Ishaq bin Manzar and many other traditionists. However, Zahri opines that smearing the hand up to the armpits is necessary. Ibn Sireen opines that three strokes are necessary – one for the face, the second for the palms and the third for the hands. There is consensus about the need for ablution both in the cases of minor impurities and major ones like the impurities caused by sexual intercourse and nocturnal pollution, although

there is a report to the effect that according to Omer and Abdullah bin Mas'ud, dry ablution is not proper in case of the impurity caused by sexual intercourse or nocturnal pollution. It is also said about them that they had revised this stance later.

It should be noted, however, that if there is impurity in any other parts of the body except those washed by ablution, then dry ablution is not permissible, though, according to Imam Ahmad, it is permissible. Thawri, Auzaei and Abu Sur opined that one should just touch that part (of the body which is impure). And when one encounters water after performing *salah* through dry ablution, it is not necessary to repeat it (the *salah*). According to Shafei, Ahmad, Ibn Manzar and Dawood Zahiri, for dry ablution it is necessary that the earth should be pure and it should have dust on the surface. According to Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik, anything that looks like earth can serve for dry ablution even if it does not have dust on it, for example, clean and washed lime etc. The Malekites even include wood among the permissible objects for dry ablution, and on ice too. (*Sahih Muslim*, vol.I, p.554; Urdu translation by Wahiduzzaman.

<sup>48</sup> It is recorded in *Sahih Bukhari* that Ayisha has reported about the Prophet that he was affected by black magic. In a report recorded in both *Bukhari* and *Muslim* it is asserted that the Prophet would think that he had done something which, in reality, he had not. Abu Bakr Jassas has refuted these reports strongly in his *Ahkaam Al-Qur'an*, and called them the fabricated reports of the misguided. To support this thought would shake the foundations of the Qur'anic view of life manifested through the verses – *إِذْ يَقُولُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنَّا تَبَتُّغُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا* and *وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاجِرُ حَيْثُ أَقْبَى*. This issue pertains to belief and the common view of the Islamic scholars is that belief cannot be based on single-transmitter reports. Despite all this, the fact remains that this thought has been widely published in tafseer literature and have considerable currency among Muslims.

<sup>49</sup> A detailed discussion on this issue, along with relevant reports, can be found in the footnotes of the third chapter.

<sup>50</sup> This concept of *ummi* that assumes that the Prophet was illiterate (God forbid!) was spread by the enemies of Islam. The Qur'an strongly contradicts this view. For details, see note 53 in the third chapter.

<sup>51</sup> *Wahi ghair matlu* is such a boundless ocean that the collections of *Sehah Sitta* cannot encompass its entire corpus. It is asserted that *Musnad Ahmad* is a compilation where the entire corpus of Hadiths has been incorporated. Probably this was the plan conceived originally by the compilers of *Musnad Ahmad* that they would put together a collection of Hadiths that would be the most comprehensive. It is said about its author Imam Ahmad that he wanted to make it the most comprehensive and a standard book. Some scholars go even so far as to say that the traditions not found in *Musnad Ahmad* should not be called traditions at all. But this is not true. Our traditionists have pointed out that many reports which are really genuine cannot be found in *Musnad Ahmad*. Shah Abdul Aziz has drawn attention to this issue in his *Bustan Al-Muhadditheen* that probably by declaring *Musnad Ahmad* to be most comprehensive and any report outside it to be invalid what Imam Ahmad really implied is that those reports not

incorporated in *Musnad Ahmad* had not achieved *shuhrat* and the status of being 'continuous'. Otherwise, according to Shah Abdul Aziz, there are many famed and correct Hadiths that cannot be found in *Musnad Ahmad*. This should also be kept in mind that if all the Hadiths compiled by the contemporaries of the authors of the *Sehah Sitta*, their predecessors and their successors have not been incorporated in the Six Books, then there is no reason why the *Sehah Sitta* should make us indifferent to other such genuine compilations of Hadiths. This is the reason why in our juristic literature, scholarly debates and exegetical discussions, we find frequent references to comparatively obscure compilations, apart from the *Sehah Sitta*. After all, how and on what basis can we ignore the compilations of genuine Hadiths by Ibn Haban, Hakim, Zia Maqddasi, Ibn Khuzaima bin Awana, Ibn Sakan, Ibn Jarood and others? Similarly, if the compilation of reports by Abu Dawood and Nasei are considered reliable by us, how can we say that the compilations of reports by Abbasi, Abdur Razzaq, Sa'id bin Mansur, Abu Ya'la Musali, Bazzaz, Ibn Jareer Darqutni, Bahaiqi, Al-Firdaus Weli are unreliable? And that if *Musnad Ahmad* can be a comprehensive source of Hadiths to us, then there is no reason why we should consider the following unreliable: *Ziyadat Ibn Ahmad*, *Musannaf Abi Bakr bin Abi Shaiba*, *Tahzeeb Ibn Jareer*, *Tarikh Ibn Mardu'ya*, *M'ajam Sagheer*, *Kabeer* and *Awsat* by Tibrani, *Gharaib Darqutni*, *Huliyah* by Abi Naim, *Sha'b Al-Iman* by Bahaiqi, *Nawadir Al-Usool* by Hakeem Tirmizi, *Tarikh Al-Khulafa*, *Tarikh Ibn Najjar*, *Kitab Al-Zu'afa* by Aqili, *Kamil Ibn Adi*, *Tarikh Khateeb Baghdadi*, *Tarikh Ibn Asakar* etc.

<sup>52</sup> The dreams through which *Bukhari* was sought to be established not merely as a scholarly work but as the most authentic compilation of the sayings and thoughts of the Prophet, and the statements whose objective was to ensure for this noblest of human efforts the status of an act that was divinely directed so that the impact of the dreams could be felt not only on the hearts and minds of the ordinary people, but also great and famous men of letters could not help being affected by the enchanting and magical atmosphere created by these dreams. Although these men of letters were not unaware of the fact that to authenticate a book on the basis of dreams is not a scholarly process, nor does the Faith of Muhammad approve that people should decide what is authentic and what is not, what is permissible and what is not, on the basis of dreams. Shah Waliullah who is regarded as a milestone in modern Muslim thinking seems to depend on dreams more than on historical principles while determining the authenticity of *Bukhari*. In his words: *وبلغنا أن رجلا من الصالحين رأى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في منامه وهو يقول مالك اشتغلت بفقهِه مجد بن إدريس و تركت كتابي قال يارسول الله ما كتابك قال الصحيح البخاري ولعمري نال من الشهره والقبول درجة لا ترام فوقها* (*Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*) i.e., I got to know that a scholar saw the Prophet in his dream. The Prophet was telling him, 'How long will you go on teaching Muhammad bin Idris Shafei's book, leaving aside my own?' The scholar asked him, 'Which is your book?' The Prophet replied, *Sehah Bukhari*. The book really achieved such fame and acceptability that more could not have been accepted.

<sup>53</sup> *Sirat Bukhari*, vol.2

<sup>54</sup> To determine the infallible nature of Bukhari's status, apart from the accepted academic or scholarly modes of *riwayat* and *dirayat*, the halo of spirituality that surrounds the entire story, have also a significant role to play. It is said about Imam Bukhari that he never recorded a Hadith without first undertaking a purifying bath and performing two *rakats* of *salah*. Some reports claim that it was compiled in the Haram Sharif where Imam Bukhari would undertake *istikhara* after two *rakats* of *salah*. In some other reports it has been claimed that Bukhari's *Tarajim Abwab* was written when he would sit between the Prophet's cell and the pulpit (*minbar*), and that he would make the fair copy of each *Tarajim Abwab* after two *rakats* of *salah*. To remove the contradiction among these reports the experts of *tatbeeq* have earmarked different places between the two holy places. However, it occurred to no one that to undertake *istikhara* or perform *salah*, one need not go on taking bath again and again. Probably the reporters thought that for *salat istikhara* taking bath was necessary, or perhaps (according to them) the *salah* performed after a purifying bath somehow facilitated understanding of divine practices. Whatever that be, how can the faithful question the authenticity of a compilation where each one of the entry was incorporated after a ritual bath, *istikhara* and prayers? But only a little scrutiny and reflection would be enough to take out a text from inside the cloak of divinity and sacredness where it has been placed. It is said that the Imam had to spend the long span of sixteen years in the compilation of *Sahih Bukhari*. Now if one looks at the Hadiths incorporated in *Bukhari*, the number of entries runs into about seven thousand, including repetitions. Now, if one counts the days that make up sixteen years they would come to a little less than six thousand. Thus, we find an average of one or two Hadiths per day. The task of recording seven thousand Hadiths in about five thousand days is not one that should be hyped up and exaggerated by creating a climate of repeated ritual bathing, *istikhara* and *salah* that would give one the impression that the Imam had been doing them time and again throughout the day. In the Islamic culture, this has been the practice, both among the Predecessors and the Successors, that men of letters not only like to take bath before addressing their audience but also consider it auspicious to perform two *rakats* of *nafil salah* before starting the day's work. It is natural to expect it from a man of learning and piety like Bukhari. Thus, there is no reason why such a practice should be hyped up in his case and described in a language that pretends to enwrap his days and night with a mantle of holiness.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Muhammad Ismail Salafi, *Hujjat Al-Hadith*, Lahore, 1981, p. 83

<sup>56</sup> Following is a biographical chart of the non-Arab compilers of *Sehah Sitta*:

1. *Sahih Bukhari* by Muhammad Ismail, from Bukhara; birth: 194 hijra/810 A.D. death: 256 hijra/870 A.D.
2. *Sahih Muslim* by Abul Hasan, from Nishapur; birth: 204 hijra/819 A.D. death: 261 hijra/875 A.D.
3. *Sunan Abi Dawood* by Abu Dawood Sulaiman, from Nishapur; birth: 202 hijra/ 817 A.D. death: 275 hijra/ 888 A.D.

4. *Jami' Tirmizi* by Abu Isa Muhammad, from Balakh, birth: 209 hijra/826 A.D. death: 279 hijra/892 A.D.
5. *Sunan Ibn Maaja* by Abu Abdullah, from Qazwin, birth: 209 hijra/824 A.D. death: 273 hijra/ 886 A.D.
6. *Sunan Nasei* by Abu Abdur Rahman Ahmad, from Nasa (Khorasan); birth: 214 hijra/ 826 A.D. death: 303 hijra/ 915 A.D.

<sup>57</sup> See, 'Muqaddama', *Fathul Bari*

<sup>58</sup> 'In the beginning Islam was weak and feeble, and it will be the same again. It will shrink back to Medina just as a snake burrows in into its hole.' Such reports not only bear the impress of the deterministic worldview (Qadri), but also express deep despair about the Faith. Perhaps they were fabricated with the purpose of creating doubts about the final and definitive nature of the True faith. What else can be said about it except that – يُرِيدُونَ لِيُظْفِقُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُنِمْ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ.

All such reports that forecast the demise of Islam or that purport to suggest that the chaos and confusion in world of thought and practice in the Muslim world is in accordance with the predictions by the Prophet, are extremely feeble in terms of evidence. We have already discussed about the forecast to the effect that the Caliphate would last for thirty years in the footnote appended to the first chapter.

<sup>59</sup> On the history of Hadith whatever has been written by Muslims in response to the Orientalists seems to have been written from a defensive point of view. There is no scope in such writings to make an objective assessment of the point of view of the rival camp, to appreciate whatever merits appreciation and point out the inadequacies or misunderstandings. As the main purpose of such writings is polemical and they are directed towards warding off attacks mounted on our Faith from different directions, it does not remain possible to look at the criticism from outside from the dispassionate view of a scholar and a researcher. And that is how we shut all avenues for any kind of evaluation or criticism from outside. There is no doubt that the Orientalists have written many things either intentionally or out of ignorance or misreading. Nevertheless, while reading such writings we should not fall victims to the apprehension that the Islamic thoughts in any would be endangered because of them, and that rather than removing the misunderstanding of the rival camp we should immediately stand up in defence of Islam. The Divine Faith never faced any danger because of people's objections. If anything faces danger, it is the delusion created by Muslim scholars, not Islam.

The questions posed by the Orientalists like Schacht, Goldziher and Juynboll regarding Hadith literature are not new to us in the context of the criticism of Hadith. From the very early times when the concept of history was undergoing change among Muslims, one could discern two distinct ways of thinking among the men of judgement and traditionists. During the early days the two streams of thinking did overlap with one another. In *Kitab al-Umm*, Imam Shafei has recorded the details of his debates with these men of judgement and the deniers of Hadith which

make it clear that the kind of scepticism regarding the sayings and practices of the Prophet engendered by Goldziher, Schacht and others is not unusual, at least in the nature of intellectual questioning, in the history of our thought so that we should feel threatened by it. However, as these thoughts had come from the Orientalists at a time when the collective identity of the community was in a shambles, and Muslim thought was undergoing a crisis because of internal stagnation and external assault, they were characterised as an attack on Islam and we considered their total refutation to be a part of our Faith.

There is no doubt that Goldziher's opinion that the Hadiths were a product of the later periods when they were sought to be validated by adducing evidence is a sweeping statement, even according to the standard of historical enquiry set by him. Similarly, Schacht's opinion that the reports or the concept of the understanding of the Faith on their basis was the product of the later part of the first century and the beginning of the second century hijra, or the statement by Juynboll that the history of Hadith literature can, at the most, take us only twenty five years back in the past, are judgments that can be contradicted on the basis of the same sources on which these Orientalists had based their formulations and arguments. The presence of the sayings and practices could be traced back not only to the period of the Prophet's Companions but to the period of the Prophet himself. Since the Muslims of the first generation were not influenced by the misguided concept of the authenticated history, and they knew how accretions had crept into the sources of the Revelation through history in the cases of the earlier communities, they kept history confined within its prescribed limits. In other words, though the sayings and practices were very much present, they were not yet used as authenticated entities. The Muslim writers, in their response to the criticism mounted by the Orientalists, instead of concentrating on this salient point of history, have tried to justify its use as authenticated sources what was certainly a phenomenon that pertained to later years. Writings of this kind by the Muslims reinforce the impression that any criticism of our decadent concept of history was, in fact, an attack on an important source of Islam. It is understandable that for those who regarded history as a fundamental source of the Sunnah considered the defence of their own concept of history as the defence of their Faith!

See the following: I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C.R. Barber & S. M. Stern, 2 vol. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967-71), II, 17-251; Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Mohammedan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950); G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance & Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); M. M. Azmi, *On Schacht's Origins of Mohammedan Jurisprudence*, New York, John Wiley, 1985); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, Chapter 3.

<sup>60</sup> It is said about Sufian Thawri that for differences in interpretation he avoided the term 'differences' Sha'rani has written in this context: قال سفيان الثوري لا تقولوا اختلف العلماء في كذا وقولوا قد وسع العلماء على الأمة بكذا (Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Muqaddama Tadween Fiqh*, Lahore, 1976, p.217)



<sup>61</sup> It is attributed to Omer bin Abdul Aziz that he used to say that if the Prophet's Companions had no differences with one another, I would not have liked that, as their differences have created space for us. There is also a report coming through Ibn Abbas that reproduces the statement of the Prophet, 'The differences of opinion among my Companions are a blessing for you.' (Habibur Rahman Kandhlavi, *Mazhabi Daastanein aur unki Haqeeqat*, vol.2, p.229)

<sup>62</sup> The wide differences among the members of the Muslim community on points of jurisprudence that was a consequence of the efforts to understand the Faith on the basis of history persist even today even after the passage of many centuries. Take for instance the issue whether a purifying bath is obligatory after sexual intercourse or nocturnal pollution where the differences of opinion compelled us to take recourse to human judgments (*ara al-rijal*) rather than *wahi ghair matlu*.

Muslim, in his 'Book of Menstruation' (Kitab Al-Haidh) have recorded two contradictory Hadiths on this issue. According to the first one, reported by Abu Said Khadri, it is stated that the Prophet had said, إنما الماء من الماء, i.e., for intercourse where there is no ejaculation, the bath is not obligatory. However, in a second report, narrated by quotes the following statement by the Prophet: إذا جلس بين شُعْبَيْهَا الأُرَيْعِ ثم جهدها فقد وجب الغسل 'وفي حديث مسطر وإن لم ينزل (that is, according to this statement, the bath is obligatory for simple intercourse). To harmonise these two contradictory reports, Muslim has issued this clarification, with reference to Abul Ala bin Shakheer, that one Hadith abrogates another in the same way a Qur'anic verse abrogates another. Now, out of the two contradictory Hadiths, which one should be taken as abrogated? This question is to be decided entirely by history. Nawwi, who is considered to be best interpreter of these Hadiths, has expressed the opinion that the community has reached a consensus about the bath being obligatory after intercourse, and that the Hadith, إنما الماء من الماء should be taken as abrogated. On the one side, Nawwi claims this consensus for the community and considers that one Hadith stands abrogated by another, on the other side he says that Ibn Abbas does not consider this Hadith abrogated, but it has been taken to mean the state of nocturnal pollution. That is, a kind of intercourse that takes place in the state of dream, waking from which one does not find any evidence of secretion.

These kinds of contradictory Hadiths attributed to the Prophet contain enough food for thought for those who are in favour of according the compilations of reportage the status of the source of the shariah and who opine that without this historical material Islam would remain incomplete. Not only that the issue in question remains hanging in the air, but also in practice, because of according acceptability and authenticity to conflicting Hadiths, it becomes immensely difficult for common people to access the truth. The common people find no other option except seeking the guidance from some contemporary Jurisprudent who would lead them through this intricate web of contradictory and mutually conflicting traditions, and consider whatever he says to be correct, as they are unable to reach any definitive conclusion on their own. As for the great Jurisprudents and traditionists, they, too, have no other options except choosing one among a plethora of judgements according to their own inclinations. The different and often contradictory judgements that we often encounter on issues of Jurisprudence and ancillary matters, it is due to

the fact that we have made divine guidance subservient to history which proffers contradictory judgements on the same issue as shariah.

The task of searching the Sunnah in the books of sayings and practices and the effort to harmonise mutually conflicting and contradictory points of view through consensus have resulted in the people's judgment getting precedence over the Prophet's utterances. Moreover, in this process, our Jurisprudents and traditionists undertook such flights of fancy and wasted their energy and time on the speculation of such potential problems in the areas that have been strictly forbidden to Muslims to traverse even in their thoughts, let alone practice. While referring to the consensus on bathing after intercourse without ejaculation, Nawwi went so far as to say that, in his words, 'Our teachers have told us that if the head of the penis enters the posterior of a man or a woman or in the orifice of an animal, bathing will still be obligatory, whether that man or woman or animal is dead or young, whether it was done unintentionally or intentionally, whether it was done by violence or mutual consent.' (Quoted in *Sahih Muslim*, Urdu translation by Wahiduzzaman, 'Kitab Al-Haidh', p.446, Lahore, 1981) In their quest for purification through ritual bathing etc., our Jurisprudents and exegetes traversed such terrains of possibilities for which there is no sanction in Islam, even in the realm of imagination. For a person who can indulge in such heinous sins and perversion, what importance will the means of purification hold for him? To show the means of purification through ritual bathing to the sinners who can go to such extreme will remind one of the tendency to hair-splitting indulged in by the Pharisees about which Moses had said, 'O cruel Pharisees, you sift mosquitoes and gobble up camels.'

## SECTION V

<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ said that the Israelite scholars were neither placed in the position of apostleship nor did they have the right to interpret Torah according to their whims and fancies. As for those who are engaged in blind imitation of these Israeli scholars, their end cannot be different from that described in the statement, 'Be misguided yourself and misguide others' (ضلوا وأضلوا):

Woe to you Pharisees! For how you love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the respectful greetings from everyone as you walk through the markets! Yes, awesome judgment is awaiting you. For you are like hidden graves in a field. Men go by you with no knowledge of the corruption they are passing. (Luke 11: 43, 44)

I have a question for you. Is it right to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do harm? To save life, or to destroy it. (Luke 6: 9)

What good is it for one blind man to lead another? He will fall into a ditch and pull the other down with him. (Luke 6: 39)

A tree from good stock doesn't produce scrub fruit nor do tree from poor stock produce choice fruit. A tree is identified by the kind of fruit it produces. Figs never grow on thorns, or grapes on bramble bushes. (Luke 6: 43, 44)

In Matthew 23, verse:4 it has been clarified further how the Israelite scholar had turned a simple religion into an immensely complex one through their juristic hair-splitting. In the words of Moses, 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light', but the scholars of the Israelites had defeated the very objective of the faith itself because of their excessive dependence on reports and practices. As it is stated in Matthew 16, verse: 6:

Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16: 6) How could you even think I was talking about food? But again I say, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16: 11)

Similarly in Matthew, verse: 14, we find severe indictment against turning the Faith into jurisprudence:

Woe to you, Pharisees, and you other religious leaders. Hypocrites! For you won't let others enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and won't go in yourselves. And you pretend to be holy, with all your long, public prayers in the streets, while you are evicting widows from their homes. Hypocrites! (Matthew 23: 13-15)

Moses expresses deep disappointment at the spectacle of the Faith being turned into jurisprudence. He declared the religion constructed by the jurists and the Pharisees to be inconsistent with the very objective of religion. This could bring forth good neither in this world nor in the world hereafter. That is why in Matthew 16, verse: 11 he exhorts people to stay away from the religion of the jurists.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Sahih Muslim*

<sup>3</sup> Indications are to the following Qur'anic verse: *وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضُ الْأَقَاوِيلِ. إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ* and *لَاخُذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ. ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ*

<sup>4</sup> That is, if one memorised *Al-Mabsoot* he became a mujtahid, whether or not he had any knowledge of the traditions or he was aware of any Hadith. (Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, edited and annotated by Al-Syed Al-Sabiq, Darul Kutb Al-Hdith, vol.I, Cairo, p.321)

<sup>5</sup> The interpreter of *Al-Intibahat Al-Mufeedah* has written:

'*Qiyas* and Hadith have their relationship with Allah's Book in only one or two ways. Then what is so surprising in terming the instructions in them as the Qur'anic instructions. Without any reservations one can characterise all of them as Allah's commandments. The scholars of Islam have gathered all these rules and called them the science of jurisprudence ... Hadith, consensus and *qiyas*, in so far as all of them derive their principles from the Qur'an, can be called an extension of the Qur'an.

*Islam Aur Aqliyat*, Commentary on *Al-Intibahat Al-Mufidah un al-Ishatabahat al-Jadeedah*, compiled by Ashraf Ali Thanavi, which was commented upon by Mustafa Arshad, p. 19, p.30, Lahore.

<sup>6</sup> For details, see footnote 12

<sup>7</sup> Topics like *اختلاف أمتي رحمة* in the books of Hadith have for centuries provided a religious basis to our mutual disagreements. Firstly, the idea that the disagreements among the followers of

Muhammad are a blessing runs in conflict with the clear instructions of the Qur'an. Allah states – وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ – (Al-Anfal: 45). That is to say, it will be a grave error if the believers differ among themselves, and if they do so they will harm themselves. At another place the believers were instructed that they must hold Allah's thread firmly and should not be divided into small groups: وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا (Aal-e Imran: 103). If anyone attributes any utterance to the Prophet that runs counter to this clear instruction of the Qur'an, one should feel no qualms to reject it outright. One does not need to undertake any scholarly investigation to do that. However, those who attribute it to the Prophet simply because of the fact that they have received it through the Predecessors, we would like to bring it to their notice (for setting their mind at rest) that many leading traditionists have declared this report to be without any reliable basis. It becomes difficult to trace its lineage beyond the fifth century hijra in his *Maudhua't e Kabeer* Mulla Ali has expressed the opinion that Qurtabi had mentioned this tradition in his *غريب الحديث* which led the later scholars of Hadiths to believe that the report could have a basis in fact. Jalaluddin Sayuti has referred it to Nasr al-Muqadasi's *الحجة* and *Behaiqi's* *الرسالة الاشعرية* where this report has been recorded without mentioning any authority. All these people belonged to the fifth century who emerged on the scene at a time when disputes on jurisprudence had created an atmosphere of confusion and disarray in the Muslim community. The jurisprudents had become the immortal reference points for the Faith. Because of serious disagreements among the jurisprudents, it had become difficult for common Muslims to decide who was right and who was wrong. In such a situation, the moderate among the Muslim thinkers found the possibility of a refuge or an escape in such a report. The insertion of this report in the books of Muslim thinkers in the fifth century should be seen from this perspective.

<sup>8</sup> In the Qur'an the indications that were made to those who were closest to the Prophet through the phrase – وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ – (of his ilk), were a band of the Prophet's earliest companions, valorous and self-sacrificing to the utmost, who have become identified with the Prophet and his mission to such an extent that a mere mention of the phrase – وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ – is enough to identify them. However, neither all the Muslims of our times can be included in this band of the Prophet's closest companions, nor all the Prophet's Companions were of identical status to be followed by others as 'stars' (كالنجوم). Such a mode of thinking is not possible without deviating from the Qur'anic scheme of thought: لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْعَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَاتِلَ. أُولَئِكَ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَقُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ وَقَاتَلُوا. وَاللَّهُ الْخَسِيُّ. وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

<sup>9</sup> For example, Shah Waliullah, in his book *حجة الله البالغة* seems to come out as a strong advocate of the stance taken by Shaikh A'z al-deen Abdul Salam that the mindless adherence to the four schools of jurisprudence is idiotic and erroneous. According to Sheikh Abdul Salam: 'In the past people used to seek edicts from any Islamic scholar they happened to come across, without investigating what particular schools of thought or jurisprudence he adhered to, nor would the scholars turn away anyone who came to seek their advice. Later, different schools of thought emerged, along with their orthodox followers who, oblivious of the central Text of Guidance (i.e.

the Qur'an), began to depend wholly on the sayings of the imams, however weak those sayings were and however feeble their authority! In other words, they were, as it were, not mujtahids but the Prophet himself each of whose words should be treated as revelation from God. This was not the way of the Truth, لا يرضى به أحد من أولى الألباب, Shah Waliullah, *Hujjat Allah Al-Balegha*, Egypt, vol.1, p.327

<sup>10</sup> See, *Durre Mukhtar*, pp.29-169; *Muqaddama Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.116; and *Muqaddama Hidayah*, vol.1, pp.95-103

<sup>11</sup> References are to the following Qur'anic verses: وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (Al-Baqara: 135), and مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا (Aale-Imran: 67)

<sup>12</sup> One tradition attributed to the Prophet equates the scholars among Muhammad's followers with the prophets of the Israelites. From the point of testing of the reports, it is an extremely weak and unreliable tradition. In the words of Imam Ahmad, this tradition should be treated as that of the marketplace (*Hadith Al-sooq*), based on hearsay and gossips. According to Mulla Ali Qari, Darimi and Zarkashi declared it to be baseless. Sayuti considered it wise to maintain silence on the issue. Hafiz Sakhawi has written in *Maudu'at-e Kabeer* that in the view of his mentor, Ibn Hajar, the tradition was baseless. Some people had gone even so far as to write that this tradition found no place in any reliable book. (For details, see, *Mazhabi Dastaanein aur Unki Haqeeqat* by Allama Habibur Rahman Kandhalwi, vol 2, p.230)

<sup>13</sup> *Kitab Al-Mizaan*, vol.1, section, 'Qaal Al-Muhaqqiqoon', p.70

<sup>14</sup> cf. *Tarikh Fiqh Islami*, p.421

<sup>15</sup> Badruddin Zarkashi also advocates such a class in the ummah (See, *Kitab Al-Qawaid fil-Fiqh* by Zarkashi, p.43)

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Milal wa al-Nahal*, vol.1, p.205

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Mawafiqat* by Shatibi, vol.4, p.3, 'إذا خلا الزمان من مجتهد صار كزمان الفترة', *Al-Burhan* by Al-Haramain, vol.1, p.251; *Al-Rad ala man Akhlad* by Sayuti, p.89

<sup>18</sup> Shah Waliullah who expressed deep anguish at the transformation of jurisprudence as a source of the Faith and who said directly that to believe in any jurisprudent is not part of *iman*, too, found any escape from this institution of mentorship (*mashaikhiyat*) difficult. According to Shah Waliullah: 'لم نؤمن بفقهاء أي كان على انه أوحى الله إليه الفقه وفرض علينا طاعته' وأنه معصوم' فان اقتدينا بواحد منهم فذلك 'لعلمنا بأنه عالم بكتاب الله وسنة رسوله' (Shah Waliullah Shah Waliullah, *Hujjat Allah Al-Balegha*, Published in Egypt, vol.1, p.328)

Shah Waliullah who has attained considerable fame regarding ijtihaad always stressed in his writings that the real sources of shariah are only the Qur'an and the Hadiths. If it was not possible even for him to totally dismiss jurisprudence, the reason for this was that he was living in such a period when Muslims, because of their intellectual decline, were compelled to live their lives governed by jurisprudence rather than the Faith. In such a situation the Qur'an could not have redressed their situation. It was a futile thought that they could lead their religious life without the help of jurisprudence. There is no doubt that in the writings of Shah Waliullah one

finds evidence of his anxiety at the decline in Muslim thought. He seems greatly concerned at the spectacle of the Faith being held hostage by jurisprudence. However, despite his intellectual breadth, the belief in the four imams seems to have a strong hold in his unconscious mind that despite his outward refusal to accord the imams the status of permanent sources for the Faith, his pronouncements appear like an extension of the thinking of the four imams, and not much else. He has written at one place, 'If it is the case of a common Muslim who lives in India or in Central Asia, where no Muslim scholars belonging to the Malekite, Shafeiite or Hanbalite school, or their religious books are not available, it will be obligatory upon him that he should abide only by the school of Imam Abu Hanifa. It will be impermissible (*haram*) for him to step out of the boundaries of that school. Because, otherwise, he would go outside the fold of shariah. As opposed to this situation, when he is in the land of haramain, it will be possible for him to know fiqhi rulings of all the schools and act accordingly.' (Quoted in, Shah Waliullah, in *Al-Insaf fi Sabab al-Ikhtalaf*, 1977, p.79)

If it has not been possible for a contemporary mujtahid like Shah Waliullah to dismiss the strange belief in the four imams, it can only be attributed to the extraordinary hold of the concept of sacred history and nothing else.

<sup>19</sup> The books of history do not contain any evidence of the fact whether in the age of the Prophet's Companions any school of thought had emerged on the basis of jurisprudence (*tafaqqoh*). Omer's intelligence was extraordinary, Companions like Ali and Abdullah bin Mas'ud were known for their deep acumen in the affairs of the world. In the assemblies of the traditionists when differing views on the perception of Hadiths began to come to the fore, and as result disputes took place regarding the proper identification of the sunnah, even then no group of Muslims or school of Islamic scholars or a single person is known to have emerged. Even though in matters of sayings and practices of the Prophet, one group was in favour of extreme care and caution, while another group did not feel any qualms in using them as an additional source. Nevertheless, in the initial phase of Islam, the ideological differences among Muslims did not assume such a sharp edge that apart from their collective identity, they would seek smaller and more exclusive identities. Being the disciple of Abdullah bin Mas'ud, Alqama and Aswad had considerable importance. Later, Nakh'ei and Hamad became known as prominent scholars. In the same period, and sometimes in the same city, different Muslim scholars held their assemblies where, apart from the provision of memorising the sayings and practices of the Prophet, the processes of drawing inferences and analogical deductions were resorted to. However, in those days there were no attempts at accentuating false identities from the seats of jurisprudents. If it were so, then there was no reason why the Hanafite jurisprudence should acquire the status of a genuine reference point in Islamic thinking for two thirds of the world Muslims, but his (Abu Hanifa's) illustrious mentors in the field like Hammad, Nakh'ei, Alqama and Aswad should not be known with reference to separate schools of thought. Neither Abu Hanifa nor his respected teachers felt the impulse to establish separate schools of thought known by their names, as Alqami, Aswadi, Mas'udi, Hammadi and so

on. At that time, these imams of jurisprudence were regarded as venerable teachers in the field. They did not possess any absolute right over the explanation and interpretation of the Islamic thought or Faith. It is for this reason when Caliph Harun Al-Rashid proposed to Imam Malik that his famous collection of juristic traditions, *Muatta* be made the constitution of the Caliphate, he (Malik) shuddered at the thought of it and dissuaded the caliph from doing so. Then it was possible for the people that they should ascertain the views of various Islamic scholars on the same issue, and benefit from their suggestions. As Abu Talib Makki has written in *قوة القلوب*: 'In the first and second century hijra, the sayings of the people were not regarded as proof, nor was there any custom of issuing edicts on the bias of a particular school of thought. There was no practice of drawing on the argument of any particular individual that would be regarded as definitive in all matters, and that only his sayings should be looked for in all cases that cropped up from time to time, so much so that all the inferences and analogical deductions should be based on his school of thought.'

(Quoted in, Shah Waliullah, *Hujjat Allah Al-Balegha*, Published in Egypt, vol.1, p.321)

In actual practice, apart from the four imams, many such great jurists of the stature of absolute mujtahids (*mujtahid-e mutlaq*) have been born in different ages. In the initial eras of Islam that can be seen as the stage of the canonization of jurisprudence, we get references to at least 35 to 40 jurists of the stature of Abu Hanifa and Shafei whose writings have not reached us. Among the jurists of the later periods, the presence of such jurists as Abu Saur Baghdadi and Dawood Zahiri whose names have been preserved in the books of history, is a clear evidence to the fact that to establish a school of jurisprudence it was not just enough that one should be endowed with the capabilities of an absolute mujtahid, but that many other social and political factors have significant roles to play. In this context, one can take the case of Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari who had become an inevitable reference point in Muslim thinking because of his *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih*, and who had impeccable credentials as a pioneer of the jurisprudence of the Prophetic traditions. His status as an absolute mujtahid could not accord him the same kind of reliability and honour as those enjoyed by the four imams. The age in which the ruler of the time, faced with a situation of constant conflicts and disputes, gave state recognition to the four comparatively famous school of jurisprudence, in that age, for some reason, Ismail Bukhari did not have such a band of devoted followers in Egypt. In the specific situation that obtained in Egypt at the time, the recognition of the four schools of thought by the state played a significant role in the canonization of the four imams. So much so that later those who achieved fame in the field of jurisprudence because of their profundity of thought and learning in jurisprudence could not gain the status of the fifth or the sixth imam. In the later ages, jurists of Islam had to take refuge in either of the four established and canonized schools of thought. Still later, although the followers of Ahmad bin Hanbal tried their best to leave the path of imitation (*taqlid*), their seeming rebellion also eventually turned out to be only an extension of conventional thinking.

<sup>20</sup> See, Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam*, edited and annotated by M. Saeed Shaikh, Lahore, 1989

<sup>21</sup> See, Subhi Mahmasani, *Filsafa Shari'at-e Islam*, translated by Maulvi Muhammad Ahmad Rizvi, Lahore, 1994. pp.71-74

<sup>22</sup> The juristic interpretation of the Faith engendered several versions of Islam. Very few people could escape the odium that resulted from the raging disputes among the jurists regarding religious Scholarship. It went to the extent that those we regard today as holy and deserving of the honorific 'imam' before their names, were not free from this narrow-mindedness and internecine battles. *Ahl al-Rai* were bitterly opposed to *Ahl-e Hadith*, and *Ahl-e Hadith* thought the scholastics misguided. The hostility shown by the Islamic scholars against one another can be gauged from the following extract by Shafei:

'About the scholastics, my view is that they should be given a sound beating, then their hands and legs should be tied and they should be put on the backs of camels and should be taken on rounds amidst the farmers and the tribals, so that people come to know that this fate would be meted out to the person who gives up the Book and the sunnah and shows predilection for scholasticism.'

It was not as though in that age these groups, viz., the Scholastics, *Ahl al-Rai* and *Ahl-e Hadith* had separate educational institutions. Everyone was not only acquainted with different kinds of learning, but also considered it necessary to draw on all branches of conventional learning to the extent possible. To stigmatise one's rivals as scholastics or to call them *Ahl-al Rai* just to signify that they were unaware of the significance of the Prophetic practices were merely attempts at proving the rivals unreliable on a social plane.

The juristic Islam accentuated mutual disagreements among Muslims to such an extent that even the leading traditionists and jurists did not seem reliable in one another's eyes. One group called names to the other group and mutual stigmatisation was considered a service to the Faith. Abu Hanifa was called a *marjiyyah*. Not only him but other Islamic scholars like Ibrahim Taimi, Amr bin Marrah, Talq Al-Habeeb, Abdul Aziz bin Abi Dawood, Yahya bin Zakariya, Mas'ar bin Kadam, Hamad bin Sulaiman and many more like them were stigmatised as *marjiyyah* and their belief was declared to be harmful for the general Muslims. But these are the names that figure among the narrators of the two most reliable books of tradition (*sahihain*). In his book, *Kitab Al-Ma'rif* Ibn Qutaibah has thrown considerable light on the mutual recriminations of these groups.

The attempt to measure *iman* on the basis of jurisprudence and to understand *iman* through the methods of jurisprudence gave rise to many unnecessary debates that were unheard of during the Prophet's time. For example, to attribute the remark to Abu Hanifa that 'My *iman* is equal to the *iman* of Abu Bakr Siddiq', was, in fact, the result of scholastic debates that had taken birth because of the juristic conditions that were laid down to designate someone as Muslim. The followers of Abu Hanifa took the concept that *iman* and action (*amal*) are two different things to



such an extent that they did not feel any qualms in equating his *iman* with that of Abu Bakr. However much correct it was psychologically, it provided ample scope for spirited retort. Whether anyone could be declared a Muslim merely on the basis of *iman*, and if the condition of actions (*amal*) is attached to it then which particular actions would be required to save the believers from the edict of infidelity (*kufir*)? Moreover, there was the question whether the *iman* increases and decreases, or whether it remains static, as the Hanafites believed, الإيمان لا يزيد ولا ينقص. In support of their argument Abu Hanifa and his followers proffered the dialogue of Abraham with Allah in which he had asked Allah about how to bring the dead back to life. The Divine voice came – أَوْلَمْ نُؤْمِنُ. Ibrahim had replied – لَبَّيْطَمَنَّ قَلْبِي. In other words, *iman* was present there, Ibrahim had made this appeal not to increase it but to strengthen it. On the other side, their opponents adduced verses such as – رَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا in support of their argument that *iman* did increase and decrease. These juristic hair-splitting tried to understand *iman* not as an inborn feeling or a state of mind but as something concrete and tangible. A purely juristic attitude towards the Faith led to the dilution of faith in Muslims, and it increased the possibility of Muslims being declared as *kafir fasiq* and *mushrik*. Jurisprudence, by its very definition, cannot see the differences in the ways of thinking as merely differences of opinions; rather it considers this to be its duty to make its position known on every issue. This is why debates began on this ancillary and fabricated beliefs and some considered them to be a part of the *iman* itself. Islam did not suffer as much damage because of the differences of opinion among Islamic scholars, as it did as a result of the juristic formulations on those disagreements or differences. For example, rectifying the Hadiths relating to the incident involving the killing of the Quraish leaders during the battle of Badr and the sense of hearing retained by the dead could have engendered a variety of responses in that age, but no one had ever thought of declaring anyone's *iman* to be 'feeble' on this basis. Although the extremism of the Kharejites had set the trend of looking at *kufir* and *iman* in purely black and white terms, but at that time when someone said to Abdullah bin Omer, 'Some people interpret the Qur'an wrongly and call us kafir; now are they kafir or not?', Omer had replied, 'As long as someone does not say that there are two Gods instead of one, he cannot be called kafir.' However, when these disagreements on conceptual and ideological issues took the garb of jurisprudence, and to explain and understand and arrest these disagreements, juristic differences came to the fore, then it became possible for the jurists to issue commands on the different groups of believers. So much so that in later years their followers became prisoners of the terms coined by them.

Scholastic debates, juristic hair-splitting and political conflicts had very soon turned Muslim society into an orthodox and parochial one. Once the *iman* of the people began to be measured on the weighing scales of juristic terms and self-styled values, it no longer remained enough to stay a believer just by uttering لا اله الا الله. In the books of *rijal*, the statement that for any believer to be a genuine one must believe that the concept of the createdness of the Qur'an was *kufir* should be seen in this light. This new, self-styled value that was being regarded as the basis for

the genuineness of *iman*, hinged merely on a verbal quibble, as those who believed in the createdness of the Qur'an meant both the words and sounds that were articulated by common Muslims through their tongues. However, those who believed the Qur'an to be eternal meant the articulation of the words by the people the roots of which lay hidden in their devotion to Allah. This kind of unnecessary debate not only engendered false beliefs, but also it became possible to declare some to be Muslims and others as kafirs on their basis. There cropped up serious disagreements and disputes among the jurists and the traditionists as a result of these juristic arguments and scholastic debates. These new articles of Faith that were being used to measure people's obedience to Islam laid the foundation of various schools of thought on the basis of differing interpretations of the Faith. Today, those we regard as the leaders of jurisprudence were considered, thanks to these scholastic debates, controversial and unacceptable in their own times. Imam Shafei, generally taken as a significant milestone in the art of Hadith, had been regarded as a teacher by the leading traditionists like Ibn Hanbal, Ishaq bin Rahwaih, Abu Zar'a, Al-Raazi, Abu Saur, Abu Hatim and so on. If we do not find any Hadith through his reference in the two most reliable books of tradition (*sahihain*), to which we made references in considerable details in the earlier chapter, there is no other reason for this except the fact that according to Imam Abu Hanifa, for the believers to be genuine those values or measures that had come to assume importance because of the struggles by the Islamic scholars to establish their group identities, too, had a role to play. Imam Bukhari used to say, 'I have not recorded any Hadith through the person who did not believe in the statement – الإيمان قول وعمل'. (See, *Muqaddama Fathul Bari* by Hafiz Ibn Hajar Asqalani). The beginning of scholastic debates in Islam laid the foundation for ancillary articles of Faith, and jurisprudence became the means to justify and validate these articles. It was considered necessary for the learned people to take a studied and considered stance on them. In such a situation it was inevitable that the same person who was considered a man of faith in some scholastic and juristic circles would be considered by the rival groups to have no faith at all.

The intensity of the differences among the jurists can be gauged from the following statement by Khateeb Baghdadi:

'This statement about Abu Hanifa has been attributed to Malik bin Anas that when mention was made to Abu Hanifa, he said in public: كاد الدين 'كاد الدين. This statement is also attributed to him: إن الداء العضال الهلاك في الدين' وأبو حنيفة من الداء: كاد الدين ومن كاد الدين فليس له دين. Another statement of the same Imam Malik runs as follows: ما ولد في الإسلام مولود أشأم من أبي حنيفة. Imam Shafei declared his writings to be a 'great evil' (شر كثير). Khateeb has also recorded one of the dreams of Muhammad bin Hammad that runs as follows: I saw Allah's Prophet in my dream and asked him what was his opinion about Abu Hanifa and his followers and whether one should abide by what they said. He (the Prophet) repeated thrice – 'no, no, no!' One should also keep in mind the following statement by Abdullah bin Mubarak: 'Whoever possesses a copy of Abu Hanifa's book *Kitab Al-Heel* and acts upon it, and issues edicts on its basis, his authority will be

considered invalid.' Ibn Mubarak goes so far as to say: *الذي وضع كتاب الحيل أشر من الشيطان* Imam Shafei opines that he had no other merit except that he was a good debater: *ناظر أبو حنيفة رجلا فكان يرفع صوته*. Sufian Thawri declared him to be both misguided himself and misleading others (*dhal mudhal*). To him, he was unreliable and inconsistent. In the words of Abdullah bin Idris, Abu Hanifa was *ضال مضل*, and in the words of Abu Yusuf he was *فاسق من الفساق*. In the words of Imam Shafei: 'If you study 130 pages from the books of Abu Hanifa and his followers, 80 pages out of them would be found to be against the Book and the sunnah. It is said that in one of the assemblies of Ibn Mubarak when it was pointed out that the people of Kufa regarded Abu Hanifa as the inheritor of the Prophet's knowledge, his heart brimmed over with emotion and tears began to stream down his beard. Then he said, 'People have made imam of a kafir.' It is said about Sufian Thawri that on the death of Abu Hanifa he thanked Allah for releasing people from a curse. To quote his words: *'ان فتان هذه الأمة قد مات'*

(See, Khateeb Baghdadi, *Tarikh-e Baghdad*, published in Egypt, 1931, vol. 13, pp. 424- 400)

During the movement for 'Nizam-e Mustafa' (in Pakistan) in 1977, the edict issued by Mufti Mahmood against Maulana Maududi presents an extension of the juristic Islam that we have been discussing so far. In the words of Mufti Mahmood:

'Maududi Sahib does not have the right to issue edicts. I have this right. So far, I have issued fifteen thousand edicts. I am issuing the edict in this press conference today that Maududi is misguided, a kafir and outside the fold of Islam. To perform salah behind him or behind anyone who belongs to his school of thought is impermissible and haram. To associate oneself with his jama'at is kufr and a despicable act. He is an agent of America and the capitalists. He now stands on the verge of death; now, no power on earth can save him. His funerals will be performed soon.' (courtesy, the weekly *Zindagi*, Lahore, November 10, 1969)

And the *piece de resistance* of this juristic understanding of the Faith is the edict issued by Ahmad Shah Noorani, President, Jamiat al-Ulemae Pakistan:

'According to the commands of the shariah Mr Jinnah is certainly an apostate, and outside the fold of Islam because of his false beliefs and the stubbornness with which he professed them. Anyone, after knowing about his kufr, still considers him a Muslim and does not consider him a kafir or expresses any doubts about his being an apostate or have any qualms in calling him a kafir, he should also be branded as a kafir and an apostate, and if he dies without repentance, he will deserve to be cursed by the people.' (*Tajanib Ahl Sunnah un Ahl Al-Fitnah*, p.122)

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Athir has written that in 475 hijra When Sharif Abul Qasim came to Baghdad on behalf of the Nizam al-Mulk as the manager of Madarsa Nizamiya, he thought it necessary to have it announced from the minaret that even though Ahmad Hanbal himself was not a kafir, all his followers were kafirs. (Ibn Athir, *Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh*, Beirut: 1979, vol.1, p.124)

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Athir, op cit.

<sup>25</sup> The canonization of the four caliphs is purely a product of political patronage. Whatever school of jurisprudence received the local political patronage thrived in that area and it drew the interest

of the people. For example, till 405 hijra, The Hanafite School of jurisprudence was dominant in Africa. However, when Ma'az bin Badees took the reign in his hands in 406 hijra, he offered his patronage to the Malekite School of jurisprudence. The dominance of this school of jurisprudence in some specific areas of Africa was due to this political coincidence. Similarly, during the Abbasid Caliphate, the fact that Abu Yusuf held the position of the Qazi allowed the Hanafite School to grow at an unprecedented pace. Muhammad, the common student of Abu Hanifa and Abu Yusuf, tried his best to propagate and establish his school with political patronage. If two thirds of the Muslim of the world today adhere to the Hanafite school of jurisprudence, its reason does not lie in any deep analysis or evaluation of the merit of this school, but in the historical and political circumstances obtaining in those periods. Shibli Nomani has written, with reference to Ibn Hazm: 'Two schools gained currency from the beginning with the help of the sultanate: one, the school of Abu Hanifa. When Abu Yusuf was appointed to the position of the supreme judge (*qazi al-quzza*), he mainly appointed only the Hanafites in the position of judges. The second was the school of Imam Malik which thrived in Andalus. As Malik's disciple Yahya Samudi was very close to the caliph of Andalus, no one could be appointed in the position of a judge without his consent. And he would get only those who belonged to his own school appointed.' (Shibli Nomani, *Sirat Al-Noman*, p.149)

No one knows how many Abu Hanifas and how many Shafeis who were called imams during their own days failed to find a mention in the books of history. Imam Awza'i who was considered, in his own lifetime and afterwards too, as the supreme imam of the entire region of Syria (*bilad-ash-sham*), and people in several countries regarded him as the most reliable imam. But gradually his impact began to dwindle, so much so that now he is no longer remembered even as a reference point.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Athir has written the following while dealing with the history of the fourth century hijra: 'When the Hanbalites gained prominence in Baghdad, hordes of them would maraud the markets of Baghdad. Wherever they found beer jars they would overturn them. If at one place they made a female singer the target of their fanaticism, at another they would damage musical instruments. They would consider their interference in matters of shariah and trade and commerce as their religious duty. If they saw a woman going along with a man they would stop and interrogate them.' (Ibn Athir, *Al-Kamil fil-Tarikh*, Beirut, 1979, vol.8, p.307)

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Batuta has written: 'There were 13 imams in that mosque. Their first imam was Al-Shafei. The period in which I had gone there, the chief justice was Jalaluddin Muhammad bin Abdur Rahman Al-Quzaini... the imam of the Shafeiites would perform the salah first. When he turned his head for salam at the terminal stage of the salah, the imam from Mashhad Ali would stand to lead the salah. After he finished, the imam from Mashhad Hussain began leading the salah, then it was the turn of Imam Al-Kalasa, then Imam Mashhad Abi Bakr, and then Imam Mashhad Uthman led the prayer. When I had gone there the Imam Al-Malikiya was the jurisprudent, Abu Omer. For the Hanafites, the imam was the jurisprudent Imaduddin ... and the imam of the

Hanbalites was Shaikh Abdullah Al-Kafeef .... Apart from the imams mentioned above, there were five more imams who acted as stand-by or substitutes. And there were azans raised all the time from early dawn to the late night.' (*Rehlah Ibn Batuta*, Beirut, 1964, p.93)

The condition of masjid-e haram at Mecca was not much different from this. As Ibn Batuta has recorded: 'According to the custom followed there, first the imam of the Shafeiites leads the prayer and this was preferred by the people in authority. The place for his prayer was located in the Hatim behind the spot of Ibrahim (maqam-e Ibrahim). Most of the inhabitants of Mecca adhere to this school of thought.... When the imam of the Shafeiites finishes his salah, the imam of the Malekites performs salah in the mihrab which is situated in front of Al-Rukn Al-Yamani. At the same time, the imam of the Hanbalites performs salah in front of the Al-Rukn Al-Yamani and the Black Stone. Then the imam of the Hanafites performs salah under this Hatim in front of Al-Mizab Al-Mukarram. In front of the mihrabs of all the imams is kept a candle. This was the arrangement of the salah performed by the people belonging to the four schools of thought. However, the prayer of maghrib is performed by all the imams and their followers at the same time. This creates confusion among the followers of the imams. That is, often the Malekites go to 'ruku' with the Shafeiites and the Hanafites often going to 'sajda' with the Hanbalites. However, since members of each group keep on hearing the azans throughout the day they are familiar with the specific timber of the voices. Even then sometimes confusion does arise'.

(*Rehlah Ibn Batuta*, Beirut, 1964, p.160)

<sup>28</sup> Imam Shaukani has criticised this step by Sultan Barqooq in the strongest language. He writes: 'عمارة المقامات بمكة المكرمة بدعة باجماع المسلمين أحدثها اشر الملوك الجراكس فرح بن برقرق في أوائل المائة التاسعة من الهجرة' (إرشاد السائل إلى دليل المسائل) 'وأنكر ذلك أهل العلم في ذلك العصر ووضعا فيه مؤلفات. (p. 58)

Translation: 'The practice of having four rows of worshippers led by four imams is *bid'at* according to all Muslims. The evil king of Charakasa, whose real name was Farh bin Barqooq, initiated it in the beginning of the ninth century. The learned men of the time opposed him and wrote books about him.'

<sup>29</sup> Shah Waliullah, *الإختلاف في بيان أسباب الإختلاف*, annotated by Abdul Fattah Abu Ghadah, Dar Al-Nafaas, 1977, p.73

<sup>30</sup> The disputes and disagreements within the Faith that began to haunt Muslim thinking because of the canonization of the four imams was sought to be removed by thoughtful Muslims in every age to the best of their ability. But as all these efforts were undertaken while treating the four imams as an alienable part of the Muslim Faith, they did not yield the desired results. Shah Waliullah too, who had undertaken an in-depth study of the decline of Muslims and who, in his writings, appeared to be an iconoclast striking at the roots of self-styled beliefs, was unable to shake off totally the influence of the four imams. More often than not, he adopts a kind of inspired style in his writings that would leave the people with the impression that he has been appointed by Allah, as it were, to take Muslims out of their current state of decline. But despite the elevated position in matters of thought, to which he places himself, if he is unable to come out with any resolution,

the reason for this lies in the fact that he wants to remedy the inadequacies of conventional thinking through conventional methods. If the prisoner falls in love with his chains, all his longings for freedom cannot make him break the chains and free himself. Here I present an extract from *Tafhimaat* by Shah waliullah:

‘An idea has been planted in my mind and it is that since the schools of Abu Hanifa and Shafei are the best known among Muslims, one sees the largest number of the followers of these schools and writings pertaining to them. The majority of the jurists, traditionists, exegetes, thinkers and mystics are the followers of Shafei, and most of the governments and common people are the followers of Abu Hanifa. Now, the rightful act or intuition that is consistent with God’s intent is that these two schools should be combined. The issues raised by both the schools should be examined in the light of traditions by the Prophet Muhammad. The things that agree with the traditions may be retained and the things for which no basis can be found may be rejected. Then those things that are fully corroborated after scrutiny, if they are consistent with both the schools, should be followed strictly. If there are disagreements on any issue, then both the points of view should be considered valid and people should be exhorted to follow either of them. The nature of this disagreement would be similar to the differences in matters of Qur’anic readings, or it will be treated as the difference between the soft option (*rukhsat*) and the hard option (*azimat*), or it will be seen as two ways for coming out of a labyrinth, or as two ways of paying penance, or like two permissible options. God willing, there will be no more than these four possible and potential conditions.’

<sup>31</sup> Shah Waliullah has written in *Al-Insaaf fi Bayaan Asbaab-e Ikhtilaf*: ‘For the common people to adopt these schools of thought and to range themselves behind them is ordained specifically by Allah, whether they feel it or not. (*Al-Insaaf*, op.cit, p. 73)

<sup>32</sup> *Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, published in Egypt, vol. 1, p. 321

<sup>33</sup> In the early stages of Islam, the assemblies of jurisprudence were merely like educational institutions. On occasions, without any obvious reasons, even well known personalities did not feel any qualms about taking leave from their known mentors or their assemblies. It is said that when Shafei who showed great affection for Muhammad bin Hakam al-Misri decided in favour of Abu Yaqoob Bawishi in his will, Muhammad was terribly unhappy at the decision. After the death of Shafei, not only that he abandoned Shafei School, he totally gave up the Shafeiite school of jurisprudence and returned to the Malekite school. And then he attained such deep profundity in the Malekite jurisprudence that people began to regard him as one of the greatest Malekite scholars of the time. In the words of the author of *قوة القلوب*: ‘In terms of devotion and piety, Bawishi was superior to Muhammad bin al-Hakam. Shafei advised them in the name of Allah and Muslims and he showed no secrecy or reservations in that matter. In working for the pleasure of the Lord he did not care for the pleasure of His creation. That is why after the death of Shafei he returned to the schools of thought followed by his father and began to teach Imam

Malik's books.' [Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Ahya Uloom al-Deen*, vol 2, p. 166; also see, Abu Zahra, *Athaar-e Shafei* (Urdu Translation), p. 320]

- <sup>34</sup> In the initial phase, the group identity of the different schools of jurisprudence was not pronounced. This is the reason why the followers Abu Hanifa had no reservations in performing salah behind a Shafeiite or Malekite imam, although they would not recite *bismillah* either audibly or inaudibly. It is said that Abu Yusuf performed salah behind Harun Rashid even though he had him vaccinated. According to the Malekite jurisprudence, ablution (*wudu*) is not considered necessary in such a situation. However, the Hanafites do not approve of this view. When someone had asked Imam Ahmad whether he could perform salah behind an imam who had blood oozing out of the spot where he was vaccinated but who did not perform ablution after that, his categorical reply was – how could I perform salah behind Imam Malik and Sai'd bin Al-Musayyib? (*Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, published in Egypt, vol.1, p.335)
- <sup>35</sup> If a Hanafite becomes a Shafeiite, he should be punished. (*Durre Mukhtar*, vol.2, p.443, *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.2, p.702)
- <sup>36</sup> If a Hanafite becomes a Shafeiite, his evidence will not be accepted. (*Durre Mukhtar*, vol.3, p.297)
- <sup>37</sup> This statement has been attributed to Abu Hamid Al-Toosi; a similar statement has also been attributed to Qazi Muhammad bin Moosa Hanafi. He declared that had it been in his power he would have imposed *jiziyah* on the Shafeiites. (See, Syed Husain Muhammad Jafri, *Iqbal: Fikr-e Islami ki Tashkil-e Jadeed*, Islamic Book Foundation, Delhi, p.135)
- <sup>38</sup> Conventional Muslim scholars have forbidden *ijtihad* in matters of drawing principles (*usool*). According to them, 'We cannot draw principles from the Qur'an and the Hadiths anymore. This method of drawing *usool* through *ijtihad* (*ijtihad fil usool*) has come to an end after four hundred years. This is because, firstly, the principles and processes of shariah have already been established by the leading mujtahids exhaustively without leaving any scope for further endeavour in the matter. Secondly, even if anyone draws principles after them, these are not found to be strong (*mustahkam*) enough and do show their weak links. This proves that human intellect is no longer capable of *ijtihad*. It was the particular privilege of the mujtahids that they drew principles from the Qur'anic *nass* with such dexterity that they have no weak links in the chain that can ever be broken.' (*Ashraf Al-Jawab*, vol.2, p.312)
- <sup>39</sup> There is a group of Islamic scholars that includes such experts in the field as Ibn Hajar Asqalani, Jalaluddin Sayuti, Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi and Mulla Ali Qari, who hold the view that the *mujtahid-e mutlaq* will emerge after the emergence of the Messiah and Mahdi. (Muhammad Abul Hasnat Abdul Haq Lakhnawi, *Muqaddama Al-Faraid Al-Bahiyah fi Tarajim Al-Hanafiyah*, published in Egypt, p.5)
- <sup>40</sup> In one of his edicts, Ibn Taimiyah has advocated that the Muslims should adopt an attitude of reverence towards the third century hijra regarding it as holy. His stance is that the claimant would be either a mujtahid or a muqallid. If he claims to be a mujtahid, he should study and

reflect on the writings of the Elders of the third century hijra, and if he claims to be a muqallid, he should imitate the Predecessors. This is because the Predecessors of the earlier century are certainly superior to the people of the later centuries.

'Fatawa Ibn Taimiyah', *Usool Al-Fiqh* part II, p.228

<sup>41</sup> To validate the canonization of the four imams and to give approval to their disagreements concerning matters of the Faith, the successors tried to trace back the history of these disagreements in matters of rituals in worship to the age of the Prophet's Companions. It is generally asserted that the mutual disagreements among the jurists which, in fact, are based on differing understanding of different reports, could be traced back directly to the times of the Prophet's Companions. However, those who are conversant with Hadith literature and who are aware of the use made of the fabricated history and reports should have known better. The mutual disagreements regarding the rituals that are attributed to the Prophet's Companions was the product of a history which, like other reports of the same kind, came to the fore much later, and cannot be considered reliable. According to these fabricated reports, it was claimed that during the period of Othman there was a great commotion about doing away with the shortening (*qasr*) of zuhar and asr prayers during Haj, and it gave rise to disputes and disputations, then there is no reason why in matters of a 'continuous' method of worship like salah that it should be performed differently by the Prophet's Companions and the pages of history should be free of any discussions regarding these disagreements. In the Prophet's mosque, after the Prophet's death, the congregational prayer used to be led by the venerable caliphs. If there was the slightest difference in their method of conducting the prayer or any details thereof, the pages of history would certainly have recorded it. If Abu Bakr who had the opportunity to lead congregational prayers during the last days of the Prophet had made the slightest change in the details of the prayers it would have come to the notice of the people saying their prayers standing behind him, and they would have certainly asked for correction. The fact, however, is that there was no disagreement among the Prophet's Companions in matters of rituals or the smallest details pertaining to salah. Of course, in matters of statecraft or politics, it was only natural that there should be difference of views, for which there was the Qur'anic instruction of – وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ –. This is the reason why in strategic matters we get references to consultative assemblies during the times of the Prophet's Companions. However, there are no references to disagreements, disputations or holding of consultative meetings in matters of rituals. Thus, all these reports through which justification is sought for the disagreements of the successors through references to the fabricated differences of the Prophet's Companions, and according to them a kind of religious validity, have no connection with actual fact. This was all a product of the imagination of the historians of the succeeding generations or the convoluted thinking of the reporters who, in order to give a fillip to unnecessary debates among Muslims, gave evidence of their extraordinary fertile imagination in fabricating reports. Even the leading traditionists seem to have been trapped by the misunderstanding created by them. Take, for instance, the case of Shah Waliullah. He was of the



view that some of the Prophet's Companions used to recite *bismillah* aloud during the salah; some used to read *qunoot* at fajr, others didn't. Some used to perform ablution after a vomit or a nasal-bleeding, others didn't. Some would perform ablution after touching the genitals and after touching women, some didn't. Some used to perform ablution after eating cooked food or camel meat, some didn't.

(Shah Waliullah, *Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, published in Egypt, vol.I, pp. 334-335)

In our view, all such reports that present the mutual disagreements of the Prophet's Companions cannot be considered genuine not simply on the grounds of intrinsic merit (*dirayat*) but on the grounds of reports (*rawayat*) as well. Moreover, the status of all these narrations, despite their claim to authenticity, is that of single-transmitter reports. It would be more reasonable to cast doubts on the reporters and their understanding of the reports than levelling the charge of mutual disagreements against the people designated as 'Prophet's People' and who were extolled in high terms by the Qur'an.

<sup>42</sup> This Hadith is not consistent with the conceptual framework of Islam according to which disagreements and disputes have been said to be the result of giving up tawheed and the way of Allah: *مِنَ الَّذِينَ قَرَأُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شَيْعًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ* (Aal-e Imran:103); *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا* (Al-Rum:32)

Muhammad bin Ayyub al-Raqi says it on the authority of Abu Bakr Al-zar that this Hadith has not been traced reliably to the Prophet. The reporter of this Hadith, Abdul Rahim bin Zaid al-Ami is unreliable in the eyes of the traditionists.

The trend of the search for the basis of the disagreements among the jurisprudents to the times of the Prophet's Companions can be seen in the pages of our history of jurisprudence. Whether the disagreements were about the details of ablution or those of salah or dry ablution, they were sought to be corroborated by history that presented the Prophet's Companions as the source and originators of differences in matters of jurisprudence. It is said that once Osama bin Zaid had asked Qasim bin Muhammad bin Abu Bakr: 'What is your opinion about reciting the Qur'an standing behind the imam in course of inaudible salah?' Qasim replied: 'Recite it in cases where you find evidence that the Prophet's Companions had done so, and refrain from it where they refrained.' We have already quoted the statement by Omer bin Abdul Aziz that it would have been surprising for him if the ulema did not disagree. According to him, the disagreements among the Prophet's Companions had widened the scope for us. This statement has also been attributed to Omer bin Abdul Aziz that each one of the Prophet's Companions was an imam by himself, and following any one of them is all right. Today if it is possible for any jurisprudent to pick out an edict of his liking from the vast repertoire of reports, the reason for it is the fact that one can find a vast range of contradictory, competing and conflicting activities that have been attributed to the Prophet's Companions and recorded as such. Since each one of the Prophet's Companions is an imam by himself, it is not at all difficult for the jurisprudent to choose an action that suits his purpose. Some Muslim scholars saw the phenomenon as an extension of a

whole range of views rather than disagreements, to which we have alluded earlier. Muhammad bin Abdur Rahman Sirfi said: 'I asked Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal if there is disagreement among the Prophet's Companions on an issue, should we scrutinize and examine the views so that we can follow the one who seems to be right?' The reply was –'No!' Then he was asked again, 'Then what should one do?' He replied: تفقد أيهم أحببت i.e., follow whoever you liked.

(*'Ikhtilaf-e Sahaba wa A'immah'*, in Ibn Abdul Bar, *Jami' Bayan al-Ilm wa Fadhlahu*, Urdu translation by Maulana Abdul Razzaq Malihabadi, Delhi, 1953, pp. 170-175)

<sup>43</sup> Tahawi has written in the footnotes of *Durre Mukhtar*: من كان خارجاً عن هذه الأربعة فهو أهل البدعة والنار. (Quoted in, *Nizamul Fatawa*, p. 33, Delhi, 1997)

<sup>44</sup> 'سيكون في أمتي رجل يقال له أبوحنيفة النعمان هو سراج أممي' The following Hadith was fabricated to condemn the Shafeiites: 'سيكون في أممي رجل يقال له مجد بن إدريس هو أضر على أممي من إبليس'. Some people even asserted that the world would come to an end during the expansion and dominance of the Hanafite jurisprudence. In the words of Al-Sha'rani: 'اتباعه في زياده في كل عصر إلى يوم القيامة قال بعض أهل الكشف قد اختار الله تعالى إماما لدينه وعباده ولم يزل'. Some of the sufis even said that Allah has chosen Imam Abu Hanifa as the leader of His faith, and made him imam of His slaves. His followers will go on increasing in every age till the Day of Judgement. Sha'rani reported that his teacher, Ali Al-Khawas, used to say: 'مدارك الإمام أبي حنيفة لا يكاد يطلع عليه إلا أهل الكشف من كبار أولياء الله' i.e., the sources from which Abu Hanifa draws his analogical deductions are so intricate and complex that apart from great mystics and sufis, it would be difficult for others to access them.

(*Mizan Al-Kubra*, vol.1, p.52)

After all, who knew it better than mystics that like the followers of Jesus Christ, the followers of Abu Hanifa have also been gifted with salvation and other bounties. Ali Al-Hijveri, the author of *Kashf Al-Mahjoob* has recorded a dream pertaining to Abu Hanifa: 'I saw that the Prophet was entering haram sharif at Mecca through the gate of Bani Shaiba taking an old man in his lap. I went forward to touch his feet. I was wondering as to who that old man could be. The Prophet said – 'He is your imam and the imam of your age.' This dream impressed upon me the fact that even though Imam Abu Hanifa had died physically, he was very much there for the commandments of shariah, and the Prophet himself was among his supporters.'

(*'Zikr Imam Abu Hanifa'*, *Kashf Al-Mahjoob*, quoted in Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, *Bazm-e Sufiyah*, Azamgarh, 1971, p.8)

It is said that Imam Abu Hanifa, during his last Haj sought the permission to enter Ka'ba one night. He stood for salah between two columns of Allah's house, on his right foot, and placed the left foot at the back of the right one. In this position he finished half of the Qur'an after which he went to *ruku'* and *sajda*, then he stood up again, this time on his left foot, and placed his right foot at the back of the left one, and in this position completed the whole of the Qur'an. Then when he turned his head for the salam, he wept and prayed to his Lord: 'O Lord, this feeble slave of yours could not pray with as much devotion as You deserve. But he tried to know You as much as You deserve to be known. May You forgive the inadequacy of the devotion in my worship for

the knowledge about You that I have acquired. That is, may You regard my acquisition of knowledge about You as a compensation for my inadequacy in serving You.' At this, a voice came from one side of Allah's House: 'Oh Abu Hanifa! You have known me as I should be known and you served me, and served me well, and certainly I forgive you. And I forgive all who follow you, and all those who abide by your way till the Day of Judgement.' (*Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.21)

<sup>45</sup> Someone saw Imam Muhammad in his dream after his death, and asked how he was. Imam Muhammad replied: 'Allah said to me, 'If I were to subject you to torment, I would not have bestowed you with this learning.'" During the dream he told the reporter: 'Here, the status of Abu Yusuf is superior to me, and that of Abu Hanifa is superior to all of us.' (Quoted in, Hafiz Abu Bakr Khateeb Baghdadi (d.463 hijra), *Tarikh-e Baghdad*, vol.2, p.171). Another dream of the same sort has been reported by Hashish bin Ward. He reported that he saw the Prophet in his dream. When he asked him about how Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal was, the Prophet said: 'Moses is about to come shortly. Ask him.' When Moses came, the reporter asked him the same question. Moses replied: 'As Ahmad bin Hanbal has proved himself truthful (siddiq) in all kinds of trying situations, he has been included among the truthful ones here.

About Imam Ahmad, an account of a dream by Maruzi has been recorded as follows: 'I saw him donning two green robes, golden shoes shining in his feet with laces of emerald, and on his head was a crown of pearls. He was walking with pride.' The reporter said – when I asked him, 'O Abi Abdullah, what is this style of walking?' He replied, 'This is the style of the attendants of heaven. Allah has allowed me into His heaven. A crown was put on my head. Allah gave me the choice to view Him.

(Hafiz Abu Nai'm Al-Isfahani (d.430 hijra), *Huliya Al-Awliya*, published in Beirut, vol.9, p.189.)

Through the narration of these dreams, not only the jurists were claimed to have been appointed by Allah, but the jurisprudence, too, got a kind of divine sanction. It is said that Imam Muhammad bin Muhammad Hakim (d.234 hijra) had compiled a handy tradition of jurisprudence with the help of some of the writings of Imam Muhammad such as, *Al-Mabsoot*, *Jami' Saghir* and *Jami' Kabir*, and named it, الكافي في فروع الحنيفة. The compiler says that he saw Imam Muhammad in his dream who seemed in a fury, and said to him, 'Allah will mutilate your body in the same way as you have done with my writings.' The reporter says that the warnings by Imam Muhammad turned out to be true to the letter. The compiler was killed in the hands of a gang of bandits from Marv, his body was chopped into two pieces that were hung from a tree. (*Hadaiq-e Hanafiya*, p.110, quoted in *Tazkeratul Al-Muhadditheen*, p.151). Such dreams were pressed into service to spread the impression that the conflicting body of literature that emerged in the name of jurisprudence was, in fact, organised by divine intervention. It should be accepted as it is. When its editing could be met with such disastrous consequences, who could have dared to criticise the disagreements of imams in matters of jurisprudence?

<sup>46</sup> For example, in *Manaqib Kardari*, an incident has been recorded with reference to Imam Shafei as follows: Imam Muhammad used to divide the night into three parts – in the first part he used

to pray to Allah, the second part he devoted to study and the third part was meant for rest. Imam Shafei said that one night when he was staying with Imam Muhammad, he kept on performing supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*) through the night while Imam Muhammad lay on his bed. At dawn, Imam Muhammad performed the salah without undertaking ablution. When Shafei enquired about ablution he said – ‘You performed supererogatory prayers throughout the night for the purification of your own self while I was engaged in making analogical deduction from Allah’s Book for the sake of the ummah through the whole night. I have drawn more than a thousand inferences during the night.’ (*Manaqib Kurdari*, vol.2, p.159). Drawing one thousand inferences in one night represents such an extreme exaggeration that only those blinded by their extreme devotion can believe in it. If one minute is earmarked for one inference, even then 1000 minutes constitute 16-17 hours. Moreover, what were the issues that the revered imam could dispose of in such terrible haste?

<sup>47</sup> In order to accord respectability to their own schools of jurisprudence and to project their mentors or leaders in larger-than-life size, the Successors, apart from dreams, have taken the help of a history which was less of history and more of an extension of their desires and dreams. It is said that the desired seat of Hammad that Abu Hanifa came to occupy in 120 hijra after his death which he kept warm till his own death in 150 hijra, can be traced back through Ibrahim Nakh’ei, Alqama and Aswad and Abdullah bin Mas’ud to the Prophet himself. In this sense the position of the arbiter of jurisprudence was no less than the position of the Prophet on which Abu Hanifa had the good luck to be ensconced. It is also said that Abu Hanifa took a step further and transformed this *majlis* into an assembly of the jurists of the time. Tawahi has narrated it through Asad bin Faraat that the students of Abu Hanifa who took part in this assembly of jurists while compiling the books (of jurisprudence) numbered forty, among whom Abu Yusuf, Zamar, Dawood Tai, Asad bin Omer, Yusuf bin Khalid Al-Tamimi and Yahya bin Abi Zaidah are the most prominent names. Tahawi has also clarified the fact that the responsibility of writing was entrusted to Yahya and that he carried out this responsibility for thirty years. It was also asserted that the selection of the scholars to the assembly of jurists was made on the basis of their expertise in different arts. For example, Imam Zafar was known for his skill to draw inferences and Mandhal had no parallel in the knowledge of Hadiths and the practices of the Prophet. Qasim bin Mu’in and Imam Ahmad were known for their expertise in literature and Arabism. In other words, this assembly of jurists led by Abu Hanifa that had to compile jurisprudence for the two thirds of the entire Muslim population for the future, was one that had come into existence through a process of studied caution which should be considered to have been intended by Allah. But in our view, this fabricated picture of Abu Hanifa’s assembly is inconsistent with the same historical evidence in which, through the same assembly, the principles of the Hanafite jurisprudence have been recorded. To falsify this entire fanfare, only one example is enough: Yahya bin Abi Zaidah who had a key role in this august assembly in the capacity of the copyist and who is said to have done this job steadfastly for thirty years, was born

in 120 hijra which is the year of Hammad's death and Abu Hanifa's ascension to the seat. Abu Hanifa is said to have died in 150 hijra. Under these circumstances, the assertion that Yahya was the copyist of the assembly, and that too for thirty years, cannot be relied historically.

As for those who are bent upon thinking that the compilation of the Hanafite jurisprudence was intended by Allah should not ignore the fact that if Allah had really intended that a body of jurisprudence should be compiled for future generations through Abu Hanifa, there would have been arrangements from Allah for the preservation of the proceedings of those assemblies and the final edited version of the work. As in the cases of many other famous ulema of the time, no genuine record of the proceedings of Abu Hanifa's assemblies has reached us. It is said that the number of issues (*masail*) dealt with by Abu Hanifa runs into more than twelve hundred and ninety thousand. (See, *Qalaid Huqood Al-Aqiyah*). According to some this number is six lakh. It is also claimed that all the different volumes of jurisprudence have been compiled in complete form during Abu Hanifa's lifetime. However, the same history tells us that this enormous treasure of knowledge gathered during Abu Hanifa's assemblies has not reached us. In *Manaqib Al-Shafei* Imam Raazi (d.606 hijra) has said it clearly that no writings of Abu Hanifa survived. The loss of such a great treasure would certainly be considered as a grievous loss by the people who consider the juristic interpretation to be the only means of understanding the Faith, or those who regard it as coming from Allah Himself. However, those who regard Abu Hanifa as a common human being of flesh and blood, who was a profound scholar of his time, would not think that a great damage to the Faith itself has occurred because of the loss of this juristic treasure. Because this loss is not only true of Abu Hanifa, but that books by many other great scholars of the time such as Imam Auza'i, Ibn Juraij, Ibn Aruba, Hammad bin Abi Mua'mmar compiled by their students in the same age have not survived the ravages of time. But the world of today has hardly any knowledge about it.

<sup>48</sup> In the Qur'anic view of life the right to create shariah belongs to Allah only: *شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ* (Shura: 13). One must know the difference between law-giving and law-making. Law-making relates to enforcement which the leaders of the Muslims would carry out in every age to achieve the objective of the Qur'an. However, from this process of explanation and interpretation no one should suffer under the delusion that he has acquired the right to create shariah. In the biography of Ibn Hisham, the following words recorded in the context of the last hour of the Prophet also confirm this fact: *إني ما أحل إلا ما أحل القرآن ولم احرم إلا ما حرم القرآن*

(*Sirat Ibn Hashsham*, vol.4, p.654)

Those who use the honorific 'شارع عليه السلام' for the Prophet ignore this fine distinction that the Prophet who was sent for implementing the Revelation did not have the right to represent it either more or less than what it was. In the words of Imam Shafei sunnat is, in fact, allegiance to the Qur'an. (*Muafiqat*, vol.4, p.9). As it is written in the verse: *وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ* (Nahl:44). In other words, sunnat, whatever it is, is the elucidation and amplification of the

Qur'an. It has no existence outside the Qur'an. As some scholars have regarded it as yet another source of Islamic law by designating it as *wahi khafi*.

An Islamic scholar of great fame in modern times, Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, has explained this fine distinction beautifully as follows: 'In Islam, creating shariah and making laws are the domains exclusive to Allah, as he is the original maker of the shariah. Now, if it is accepted that the Prophet had the right to make his own shariah from the Book, it would mean that we accept another shariah-maker apart from Allah.'

(*Sirat al-Nabi*, Azamgarh, 1973, vol.4, p.195)

<sup>49</sup> See, Abul Hilal Al-Askari, *Kitab Al-awail*

<sup>50</sup> Abu Hanifa has declared the study of scholasticism to be forbidden. For instance, Abu Hanifa who, according to the convention of his time, studied scholasticism, arrived at the conclusion that for the seekers of the Truth, study of scholasticism is not appropriate. He has also a known edict on the issue.

In the Preface to the commentary on *Fiqh Akbar* the statement by Qazi Abu Yusuf has been recorded as follows: لا يجوز الصلوة خلف المتكلم وان تكلم بحق لأنه مبتدع. That is, performing salah behind a scholastic is not permissible, even if he argues for the defence of the Truth, because he has committed *bida't*. The four great masters of Sunni Islam consider the study and teaching of scholasticism as undesirable (*makrooh*). Their stand on the issue are well known.

<sup>51</sup> See, Shafeis edict regarding the scholastics, cf. 22

<sup>52</sup> *Usool Al-Sarkhasi*, vol.1, p.279

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.281

<sup>54</sup> Allama Ibn Humam has written in *Tahrir Al-Usool*:

لا جرم أن القول المحرر أي المستقيم المروي عنه أي: شافعي كقولنا بصريح لفظه قال: ذكر الله الأخوات من الرضاع بلا توقيت' ثم وقتت عائشة الخمس' وأخبرت أنه مما أنزل من القرآن فهو وإن لم يكن قرآناً يقرأ فأقل حالاته أن يكون عن رسول الله' فهذا عين قولنا' وعليه جمهور أصحابنا كما نقله الأسنوي وغيره حتى احتجوا بقراءة ابن مسعود فاقطعوا أيانها على قطع اليمنى.

(تيسير التحرير لمحمد أمين المعروف بأمير بادشاه على كتاب التحرير) vol. 3, pp. 9-10)

There is no doubt that the statement reported by Shafei is the same as ours, and his clear statement is an evidence to that effect. About the issue of the relationship between foster brothers and sisters, Shafei states: 'Allah ordained foster sisters to be *haram*, but did not specify any quantum for that.' Hazrat Ayisha clarified it by stating that the quantum was five sips. She further stated that this quantum was specified by the Qur'an. Though this clarification does not exist in the Qur'an but at least this was clear that it was narrated on the authority of the Prophet. The statement of Shafei is the same as that of Abu Hanifa; the majority of the Prophet's Companions also hold this view, as recorded by Asnawi and others. These gentlemen have also offered as evidence Abdullah bin Mas'ud's reading of 'فاقطعوا أيانهما' to justify chopping of hands as a punishment for stealing.

<sup>55</sup> See, chapter, 'باب حكاية قول الطائفة التي ردت الأخبار كلها', كتاب جامع العلم, Muhammad bin Idris Shafei *Al-Umm*, Beirut, Daar al- Ma'rifa, vol.7, pp.273- 278.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *Al-Ahkaam*, by Aamadi, vol.2, p.113, and *Al-Risala* by Shafei, p.75

<sup>58</sup> There is a good deal of confusion among the jurisprudents regarding the definition of consensus. Even the same jurisprudent employs it in different meanings in different contexts. Sometimes it is taken to mean those commandments of the Book and the sunnah about which there is no dispute, and on which there is unanimity among people. (See, Shafei, *Al-Risala*) Sometimes, it is taken to mean the consensual decision of the ulema of the time, in the absence of clear injunctions (*nass*) from the Book or the sunnah. As Shafei writes in the chapter 'Ibtal al-Istihsan' in *Al-Risala*, apart from the above usage, there is a third usage that all jurisprudents frequently resort to and it is this: a precedent established on an issue because of a historical process, whether it is based on the Book and the sunnah, or whether it has evolved through the understanding and reflection of generations of ulema through the ages. There is a good deal of difference in all these usages of consensus. However, as the jurisprudents have characterised all these usages as consensus, often it so happens that a purely rational or intellectual stance can give one the impression of the *nass* (of shariah). Regarding all these kinds of consensus as proof (*hujjat*) in matters of Faith have not only led to according a permanent status to the interpretation of the Faith of a particular period, but it also happened that decisions arrived at by jurisprudents in response to topical issues in matters where no clear Qur'anic injunctions were available came to acquire a permanent status with the passage of time.

<sup>59</sup> To use consensus as evidence in shariah Imam Shafei has drawn on the following verse: 'وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصَلِّهِ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا' (Al-Nisa:115).

<sup>60</sup> According to traditionists, the words of this Hadiths and its authority are not reliable. However, some scholars such as Ibn Hazm consider it correct as far as the meaning is concerned. See, *Al-Ahkaam*, vol.4, p.133

<sup>61</sup> Sayuti has recorded this Hadith in *Al-Jami' Al-Sagheer* with reference to *Tirmizi*. See, *Al-Sayuti Al-Jami' Al-Sagheer* from *Hadith Al-Basheer Al-Nazeer*. Hadith number 1004, Matbu'a Mustafa Muhammad, 1352 hijra.

<sup>62</sup> See, *Al-Mughni*, vol.7, p.118, and *Sunan Ibn Maja*, vol.1, p.659, quoted in *Al-Mufasssal fi Ahkaam Al-Mar'ah*, Abdul Karim Zaidan, vol.7, p.375

<sup>63</sup> The reference is to the following statement attributed to Ibn Mas'ud: 'ما رآه المسلمون حسناً فهو عند الله حسن وما رآه المومنون قبيحاً فهو عند الله قبيح' i.e. that which the Muslims think good is also good to Allah, and that which the Muslims consider bad is bad to Allah. Some traditionists have considered it to be a tradition of the Prophet (as Aamadi has done it in his book, *Al-Ahkaam*, vol. 1, p. 112), but Sakhawi in *Maqasid-e Husni* has attributed the statement to Abdullah bin Mas'ud.

<sup>64</sup> According to Imam Malik, only the consensus of the inhabitants of Medina is acceptable. He produces the following Hadith as evidence: إنما المدينة الكبر تنفي خبيثها وينفع طيبها... وهي المدينة تنفي الناس كما ينفي الكبر خبث الحديد.

See, *Muatta* and its Commentary, *Tanweer Al-Hawalik*, published in Egypt, 1348 hijra vol.1, pp.201-202

<sup>65</sup> Dawood Zahiri does not consider the consensus of anyone else except that by the Prophet's Companions acceptable as evidence.

<sup>66</sup> It has been narrated from Imam Ahmad that whoever claimed to have arrived at a consensus was false. Quoted in Muhammad Al-Khudri, *Tarikh Fiqh Islami* (Urdu translation), Azamgarh, p.291

<sup>67</sup> Among the Hanafites, the silent consensus is taken as evidence, but Shafei does not consider silent consensus to be evidence. According to Amodi, the silent consensus can only indicate to an opinion and not proof. (See, Saifuddin Abi Al-Hasan Al-Amoodi, *Al-Ahkaam fi Usool Al-Ahkaam*, published in Egypt, vol.1, p.130

<sup>68</sup> Aamadi and other scholars of Usool have advocated this view.

<sup>69</sup> See, Shaikh Muhammad Mahdi Al-Kazmi, *A'naween Al-Usool*, Baghdad, 1342 hijra, vol. 2, p. 7

<sup>70</sup> The jurists of Usool have generally confused consultation with consensus. Those who regard consensus as an evidence of shariah present, in support of their stance, the precedents of the different occasions when Abu Bakr and Omer had invited *ahl-al-rai* and other people for consultation in the affairs of collective life, and after debates and discussions took unanimous decisions and then took measure to implement them. Saeed bin Al-Musaib narrates a report from Ali as follows: Ali had said to the Prophet – 'O Prophet of Allah, sometimes such matters are brought to us about which there are no clear instructions in the Book or the sunnah. The Prophet replied – in such a situation have an assembly of scholars and pious Muslims called, and do not take any individual decision. According to our view, all such instances represent cases of consultation and not of consensus.'

<sup>71</sup> For details, see, Chapter, 'حكاية قول من رد خبر الخاصة' *Kitab Al-Umm*, published in Beirut, vol.7, pp.278-286

<sup>72</sup> This fabricated verse of *rajm* can be found in *Al-Itqaan*, vol.2, p.64. Detailed discussion on the issue can be seen in Chapter 3

<sup>73</sup> For details, see, chapter 4, p.226

<sup>74</sup> A detailed discussion on this issue can be seen in Chapter 4

<sup>75</sup> See, Muhammad Baqar, 'Hul al-aqool le aqd-alfahool', in *Wasilat Al-Wasail*, p.53

<sup>76</sup> الأحكام في أصول الأحكام لابن حزم annotated by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, published in Egypt, 1347 hijra, pp.51-55

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Al-Qayyim Al-Jaoziya, *E'laam Al-Mu'qqain un Rabbil Alameen*, Beirut, 1389 hijra, vol.1, p.31

<sup>78</sup> It is said that words do not contain meanings that are merely on the surface but a lot depends on the readers' own intellectual orientation, so that he reads whatever he wants to read in them. It was imperative that difficulties would arise for those who wanted to read the Qur'an as a book of laws because it does not use the specific legal idiom/ jargon, nor does it employ a style suited to score legal points. Here, the entire emphasis is on igniting piety in the hearts and minds of human beings. For example, while exhorting people to treat parents with kindness and affection,



it was considered sufficient merely to state that the offspring should ensure that the parents are not compelled to utter 'Oh'. As for those who were using a legalistic idiom to explain the implication of this statement were left with no other alternative but that in order to draw commandments from this verse they should establish legal parameters according to their own judgment.

This became a subject of dispute among the ulema as to whether the style (of the Qur'an) admitted of human inferences or whether it should be treated as literary style. Some looked at it merely from a legal perspective while others insisted that it was merely a matter of literary style where commandments can be drawn without the interference of human inferences (*qiyas*). For example, the Hanafite jurist Sarkhasi (d.490 hijra) strongly advocated the view that the commandments can be drawn to the effect that the parents must be saved from all kinds of pain and hurt from the style of the statement. Those who have some knowledge and taste of the language and the style do not need the help of inference to understand the deeper intent of the Qur'an. But this view of Sarkhasi did not find acceptance with the Shafeiites who said that the special style of the Qur'an was different from the exact language of law. That is why to draw commandments one must take recourse to inference (*qiyas*). Shirazi who has the status of an important Shafeiite jurist, stated that in this context 'Oh' also means safeguarding parents from all kinds of pain and troubles which cannot be understood without taking recourse to inference. Another Shafeiite jurist, Mawardi (d.450 hijra), has characterised this verse as an example of 'open inference' (*qiyas-e jali*). His view was that the expression 'Oh' represents only physical pain, it does not include psychological anguish. All this can be understood only through the means of inference. It is possible for a king or a feudal lord to issue the command of his father's killing laying down the stipulation that he should be killed even before the sound 'Oh' can escape his lips. That is why if the meaning of the verse is not made clear by means of inference, its object remains rather indeterminate. Ghazali tried to strike a middle path out of this impasse. His view was that if from the word 'Oh' the meaning that parents should not be subjected to pain were drawn, then it would not certainly be regarded as inference. However, if the idea of physical pain is inserted on the basis of intellectual ratiocination then, of course, it would be regarded as some kind of inference. Ghazali refused to accept the idea that commandment can be drawn from this verse merely on the plane of literary style because, according to him, it cannot be done without taking recourse to inference. Shaukani (d.1255 hijra) whose gaze was certainly fixed on this kind of juristic dispute arrived at the conclusion in his *Irshadul Fahul* that this verse should be understood at the level of inference. Our view is that the real issue here is not whether the Qur'an is a masterpiece of style or whether it should be regarded as a book of laws. We have presented the disputes among the jurists regarding the interpretations of 'Oh' to underline the fact that instead of trying to read the Qur'an as it is, instead of lighting up their lost ways and instead of igniting the flame of piety within themselves when the jurists began to see it as a book of laws, then everyone found that such a thick

layer of interpretation overlaid the meaning that it was difficult for the juristic intellects to penetrate it. The result was that the sublime music of Qur'anic recitation (وَرَزَّلَ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا) could not touch us in the heart and transport us to a world of spiritual ecstasy.

<sup>79</sup> Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa*, Egypt, 1356 Hijra, vol.1, pp.8-9

<sup>80</sup> See, Shirazi, *Sharah al-Lama'*, vol.2, pp.804-6

In *Bukhari*, the Hadiths on this subject are as follows:

- (a) حدثنا أبو الوليد حدثنا الليث عن ابن شهاب عن ابن مالك بن أوس سمع عمر رضى الله عنه عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: البر بالبر ربا إلا هاء وهاء والشعير بالشعير ربا إلا هاء وهاء والتمر بالتمر ربا إلا هاء وهاء.
- (b) حدثنا إسماعيل حدثنا مالك عن نافع عن عبد الله بن عمر: أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم نهى عن المزابنة. والمزابنة بيع التمر بالتمر وبيع الزبيب بالكرم كيلا
- (c) حدثنا ابوالنعمان حدثنا حماد بن زيد عن أيوب عن نافع عن ابن عمر أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم نهى عن المزابنة. قال والمزابنة أن تبيع التمر بكيل إن زاد فلي وإن نقص فعلى قال: وحدثني زيد بن ثابت أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم رخص في العرايا يخرصها.
- (d) حدثنا عبد الله بن يوسف أخبرنا مالك عن ابن شهاب عن مالك بن أوس أخبره أنه التمس صرفاً بمائة دينار فدعاني طلحة بن عبيد الله فترأى صناعتى واصطرف منى فأخذ الذهب بقيطها في يده ثم قال: حتى يأتي خازني من الغابة وعمر يسمع ذلك فقال: والله لا تفارقه حتى تأخذ منه قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم بالذهب بالذهب ربا إلا هاء وهاء وهاء والتمر بالتمر ربا إلا هاء وهاء. (Sahih Bukhari, Lahore, Maktaba Rahmaniya, vol. 1, pp. 858- 859, Hadith no. 1350- 1352, Urdu translation)

#### Translation

- (a) It was described to us by Abul Al-Walid, who said he heard it from Laith, and he from Ibn Shahab, and he from Malik bin Aus, and he heard it from Hazrat Omer, who heard it from the Prophet. He said: To sell wheat in exchange of wheat is to charge interest, but hand to hand (instantly); and to sell barley in exchange of barley is to charge interest, but hand to hand (instantly); and to sell date fruits in exchange of the same is to charge interest, but hand to hand.
- (b) It was described to us by Ismail, who said he heard it from Imam Malik, who heard it from Nafi', and he from Abdullah bin Omer that the Prophet has forbidden to indulge in 'mazabana' which means, to sell the dates just plucked from the tree in exchange of dry dates, which is like selling grapes in the creeper in exchange of raisins.
- (c) It was described to us by Abu Al-Nu'man, who said he heard it from Hammad bin Zaid, who heard it from Ayyub Sakhtiani, and he from Nafi', and he from Ibn Omer, that the Prophet has forbidden *mazabana*. According to Ibn Omer it (*mazabana*) meant that if anyone sells the fruits on the trees in exchange of dry fruits and tells the buyer – if the fruits on the trees turn out to be more than the dry ones, then they would belong to him, and if they turn out to be less, then he would be given some more. Ibn Omer reported that the Prophet allowed the above mode of transaction known as 'araya', to be given on the basis of a rough estimate.
- (d) It was described to me by Abdullah bin Yusuf, who said that he heard it from Imam Malik, who heard it from Ibn Shahab that Malik bin Anas had wanted to change a hundred gold

coins, he was called by Talha bin Ubaidullah. Malik reported that there was a dispute between him and Talha at the end of which he agreed, took the coins and began to turn them over in his hand. Then he said, let my treasurer come from Tamama. Omer was listening to this and said to me – By Allah! Do not leave Talha as long as you haven't recovered the money from him, because the Prophet said that to sell gold in exchange of gold or silver is forbidden, but hand to hand, and to sell barley in exchange of barley is to charge interest, but hand to hand; and to sell date fruits in exchange of the same is to charge interest, but hand to hand.

<sup>81</sup> Shirazi, *Sharah al-Lama'*, vol.2, pp.856- 857

<sup>82</sup> It has been a matter of dispute among the Israelite scholars as to whether it is permissible to open the fridge on Sabbath. This is because when the fridge is opened, the running of the automatic motor or the igniting of the bulb inside it might be counted as worldly job which would affect the dignity of Sabbath. To get out of this impasse, some Israelite scholars suggested that a timer should be attached to the fridge, and the door should be opened only when it is not the time for the motor to run, and that the bulb should be taken out that day or some ways should be found so that it does not light up. If by mistake it so happens that the fridge is opened in such a way that the person opening it might be accused of turning on or turning off the bulb, then in such a situation, to compensate for this indignity towards the Sabbath, it is essential that he should keep the door of the fridge open and then get it closed by a non-Israeli person. However, it is not permissible to give clear instruction to the non-Israeli to this effect, but it should be conveyed through gestures etc. Some scholars opine that the Israeli children should be given this task. (See, *Deyunei Halacha*)

<sup>83</sup> See, Al-Baji, *Ahkaam*, p.263

<sup>84</sup> Ghazali, *Al-Shifa'*, p.452

<sup>85</sup> Shirazi, *Sharah al-Lama'*, vol.2, p.806; Baji, *Ahkaam*, p.629

<sup>86</sup> Shirazi, *Sharah al-Lama'*, vol.2, p.812-814

<sup>87</sup> In his autobiography, *Al-Munqad Min Al-Zilal* Ghazali mounted a strong criticism of those Muslim intellectuals who through the means of *ratio legis* had made forbidden things (*muharrimat*) 'harmless' (*mubah*) for themselves. There was never any dearth of non-practicing Muslim intellectuals like Ibn Sina or Farabi.

See, Ghazali, *Roshni ki Taraf* (Urdu translation of *Al-Munqad Min Al-Zilal*), Lahore, Hamid & Company, pp.97-98

<sup>88</sup> Imam Najmuddin Abdul Qawi Taufi (d.716), one of the leading figure among the Hanbalites, went so far in the interpretation of لا ضرر ولا ضرار that to him even the *text* and consensus are subservient to common good (*masaleh*). He says that in matters of belief and rituals, direct ruling of the text and consensus of scholars have the merit of evidence; however, the changing conditions of social life demand that they should be carried out keeping in mind the larger

interest of humanity. In such a situation, so says Allama Tufi, that the textual evidence (*nass*) and consensus (*ijma*) should be considered as having only temporary validity.

Mustafa Ghalalini, *Al-Islam Rooh Al-Madina*, Beirut, 1935, p.30

<sup>89</sup> During the Prophet's time, salah was a symbol of submission to Allah. People concentrated on their prayers with utmost sincerity and devotion. However, when jurists began to study and reflect on a unanimous, uninterrupted and long-inherited activity like salah, different parts of it were assessed to ascertain how much importance each part (*ruk'n*) has, and gave it a different name. The result of this rational exercise in determining the comparative merits of different parts of a purely devotional activity was that there occurred serious disagreements among jurists on a fundamental method of worship like salah. Every group insisted on the fact that the kind of salah stipulated by them, indeed, best represented the real spirit and depth of devotion. Abu Hanifa expressed the view that the *takbir tahrima* which is done with the utterance of *Allahu Akbar* may be done by uttering alternative phrases. For example, if a person says 'Allah A'zam' or 'Allah Ajal', it would not make any difference to his salah. Shafei contradicted this view strongly and said that in such a situation the salah will be invalidated. If Abu Hanifa advocates *takbir* in non-Arabic language, Shafei does not permit it at any cost. According to Abu Hanifa, any verse of the Qur'an may be recited to fulfil the condition of *qirat*, but according to Shafei, without surah Fatiha, the salah cannot be said to be perfect. Abu Hanifa goes so far as to say that the non-Arab people can recite the translation of the Qur'an in salah but Shafei does not approve of this.

The Hanafites have enumerated the number of sunnat in salah up to forty, for the Malekites this number is fourteen. The Shafeiites divide the sunan in salah into two categories, namely, *haiyaat* and *abghadh* (where the number of sunan is known and determined, unlike the former). While they have not determined the former, the number of sunnat associated with the latter has been enumerated to be twenty. According to the Hanbalites, the number of sunnat in salah is 68 and they fall in two categories – *qauliya* (that which is said verbally) and *fe'liya* (that which is performed physically). This is the conflicting picture of an interrupted and permanent activity like salah presented by different schools of jurisprudence.

<sup>90</sup> According to the Hanafites, there are four essentials (*faraidh*) of ablutions: washing the face, washing the hands up to the elbow, washing the feet up to the ankles, passing fingers over (*masah*) one fourth of the head. According to the Malekites, the essentials of ablutions are seven: *niyat*, washing the face, washing the hands up to the elbow, washing the feet up to the ankles, stroking the entire head, *mawalat* i.e., washing all the parts quickly in such a way so that the other parts washed earlier do not dry up, and rubbing some parts (to facilitate soaking of those parts) such as tousling the hair and interlocking the fingers. According to Shafeiites, the essentials of ablutions are six: *niyat*, washing the face, washing the hands up to the elbow, passing fingers over part of the head, washing the feet up to the ankles, and finally, the above order should be strictly followed. If the proper order is not followed then the ablution would stand invalid. About the proper order, the Hanbalites have the same view, while the Malekites and the Hanafites

believe that following any particular order is not obligatory. According to the Hanbalites, the essentials of ablution are six among which are -- washing the face, washing the hands up to the elbow, stroking the head including ears, washing the feet up to the ankles, following the proper order, and *mawalat*, i.e., washing all the parts quickly in such a way so that the other parts washed earlier do not dry up. According to the Shafeiites and the Hanafites, *mawalat* is sunnat, not obligatory, while the Malekites consider it obligatory. (For further details, see the relevant chapter in *الفقه على المذاهب الأربعة للإمام الجزري*.

<sup>91</sup> As in cases of other issues, there is strong dispute among the four imams about bathing too. According to the Hanafites and the Hanbalites, gurgling and pouring water into nostrils are obligatory, while the Shafeiites and the Malekites believe that washing only the external parts of the body is obligatory. Gurgling and pouring water into the nostrils cannot be considered obligatory either for ablution or for bath. There seems to be unanimity about the fact that water should reach all parts of the body, even inside the navel and other holes in the body that have come to be there because of surgical operation or other incidents. However, according to the Shafeiites it is not necessary that water must reach in the holes pierced in the ears of women for wearing rings, even if it is possible to do so. According to the Malekites, if the hair is dense then it is necessary to shake and tousle it so that water reaches the roots quickly, while according to the other three imams, it has to be only ensured that water reaches the roots of hair. There are also disputes about plates of hair. According to the Hanafites, it is necessary to untie them, although if a woman uses such perfume as prevents the water from reaching the root does not enjoy this exemption. The Hanafites, the Hanbalites and the Shafeiites are unanimous on this, while the Malekites hold the view that for a newly wedded bride, this exemption can be extended in matters of using perfume and ornaments. According to the Shafeiites the *niyat* is obligatory for bath; the Malekites also hold the same view. The Hanafites consider it a sunnat while the Hanbalites hold the view that it is stipulated as a condition which is not obligatory.

<sup>92</sup> Imam Shafei does not approve of the view that if a pregnant woman dies with a living baby in her womb then it should be taken out ripping the womb open. As opposed to this, Abu Hanifa is of the view that the baby should be taken out of the womb. It is said that Imam Tahawi who once belonged to the Shafeiite school of thought and who had been taken out of the womb of his dead mother became aware, during his study, of the view of the Shafeiites, changed his school and moved over to the Hanafite School. He is reported to have declared – ‘I do not want to abide by the view of a person who advocates my extinction.’ (*Hadaiq-e Hanafiya*, p.165)

<sup>93</sup> Sheikh Ibn Bazaz Kurdari, *Manaqib-e Kurdari*, vol.2, p.158

<sup>94</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.105; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.112

<sup>95</sup> *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.1, p.81

<sup>96</sup> *Alamgiri*, vol.2, p.882; *Hidayah*, vol.2, p.621; *Sharh Waqayah*, p. 359, *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.4, p.57

<sup>97</sup> In *Majmua Qawanin Islami* compiled by the Personal Law Board, for determining lineage, the minimum period of six months and the maximum period of two years has been determined,

which, in fact, has been borrowed from old books of jurisprudence. (See, the chapter 'في ثبوت النسب' in الدر المختار على هامش رد المختار, vol.2, p.857; see also, *Majmua Qawanin Islami*, compiled by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Delhi, 2001, p.221)

<sup>98</sup> *Sharh Waqayah*, p.261; *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.2, p.81

<sup>99</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.245; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.245, and pp.405–480; *Sharh Waqayah*, p.115, *Kanz Al-Ammal*; p.44, Quduri, p.28; *Maniyatul Musalli*, p.81; *Ma la Bud Minhu*, p.30

<sup>100</sup> *Maniyatul Musalli*, p.100

<sup>101</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.226; *Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.99; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.351; *Sharh Waqayah*, p.93; *Kanz Al-Ammal*, p.35; *Maniyatul Musalli*, p.82; *Ma la Budaminhu*, p.25; *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.2, p.34

<sup>102</sup> For example, during salah, for women the commandment regarding tying of hands on their chest has been incorporated, without any evidence from the shariah, from one book of jurisprudence to another, and it has travelled from the age of *Hidayah* to the age of *Bahishti Zewar*

<sup>103</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, pp.150-151; *Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.58; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.213; *Sharh Waqayah*, p. 75

<sup>104</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.53

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p.107

<sup>106</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.4, p.386

<sup>107</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.4, p.224; *Sharh Waqayah*, p.406

<sup>108</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.95; *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.1, p.76

<sup>109</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.115

<sup>110</sup> *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.1, p.76

<sup>111</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.99

<sup>112</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.23

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* p.105

<sup>114</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.55

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p.105

<sup>116</sup> Quduri, p.17

<sup>117</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.106; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.119; *Sharh Waqayah*, p.51

<sup>118</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.153; *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.117

<sup>119</sup> Abdur Rahman Al-Jazri, *Al-Fiqh A'la Mazahib Al-Arba'*, Beirut, 1990, vol.1, p.20

<sup>120</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.65

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>123</sup> *Mazahib Arba'*, p.20; *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.162; *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.61;

*Hidayah*, vol.1, p.226; *Ma la Budminhu*, p.16

<sup>124</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.153; *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.31; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.117

<sup>125</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.28; *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.1, p.57

<sup>126</sup> *Sharah Waqayah*, p.57

<sup>127</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.143

<sup>128</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.34

<sup>129</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.5; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.6; *Bahishti Zewar*, vol.1, p. 57

<sup>130</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.6

<sup>131</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.53

<sup>132</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.245; *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.6

<sup>133</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.147

<sup>134</sup> *Fatawa Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.6

<sup>135</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.55

<sup>136</sup> For example, look at kind of obscenity displayed in the stratagem related to divorce. Ostensibly, the subject under discussion is divorce, but the entire focus seems to be on the question as to whether, from an aesthetic point of view, the private parts of women are more beautiful than those of men! If the husband tells the wife, 'If my private parts are not more beautiful than yours, then I divorce thee', and if the wife also tells the same to the husband, then, according to Imam Muhammad if both were standing during the dialogue then the wife would get precedence over the husband, and if they were sitting then she would be defeated. This is so because, according to this particular understanding, while standing the private parts of women look more beautiful than those of men. The case, however, would be reverse in the sitting posture, because the private parts of women in this position look ugly. However, during the dialogue if one remained standing and the other sitting, then nothing could be said with certainty. In such a situation the vow taken by both would stand invalid. (*Fatawa Qazi Khan*, vol.2, pp.167-168)

<sup>137</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.82

<sup>138</sup> *Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.16

<sup>139</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.80

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>142</sup> *Hidayah*, vol.1, p.73

<sup>143</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.80

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p.80

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>146</sup> After jurisprudence came out of the framework of the Faith, it became an arena of Pharisee conflicts and disputes that, in the words of Jesus Christ, engaged in 'sifting mosquitoes and swallowing camels'. The juristic processes and points of view initiated by Hillel and Shammai were, in later years, were inflected and amplified by the Talmudic jurists in such a way that they totally severed their connection with the Torah. The best criticism of the deviations of the Israelites in matters of jurisprudence was mounted by Christ in his address which is known as the 'Sermon on the Mount' to which we have made a mention earlier. In our case, when

jurisprudence, instead of aiding devotion in the way of the Faith, got trapped in human intellectual gambits, the jurists were engaged in hair-splitting about the essentials of bath and the finer points of attaining purity, and lost sight of those acts that, without the obfuscation of jurisprudence, would make people entitled to the severest punishment. There is no dearth of fabricated or speculative issues, steeped in sensuality, in the books of jurisprudence such as *Alighieri*, *Durre Mukhtar* and *Hidayah* that take people seeking guidance about ablution and bath to such realms of possibilities where the believers should not enter even in their imagination.

(See, *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.80- 83; *Alamgiri*, vol.1, p.16-19; *Hidayah*, vol.1, pp.73-74)

<sup>147</sup> Shariah, according to its very definition on principle, is the address of the shariah-giver, as it is stated in *الشريعة مالا تدرك لو لا كتاب الشارع* (published in Egypt, p. 16):

<sup>148</sup> 'والأولى أن يكون الشرع اسما للدين فلا يحتاج إلى التأويل' (translation: shariah is the name of the Faith that does not require elucidation) *Noor al-Anwar*, Delhi, Matb'a Mujtabai, p.6

<sup>149</sup> For example, if among the Shafeiites it is considered impermissible to do ablutions and bath with the water warmed by flames of cow dung, or to cook food in the utensils made of earthenware mixed with cow dung, or it was not customary to use kitchen wares made of expensive metals like glass or cornelian, or it was considered impermissible to use wares with silver work on them, all these things have been declared permissible by the Hanafites in very clear terms.

<sup>150</sup> Muhammad Asim Al-Haddad, *Fiqh Al-Sunnah*, Delhi, 2003, p.27

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p.28

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p.53

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p.66

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. pp.174-175

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. p.176

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. p.206

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p.247

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. p.263

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p.273

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. pp.308-309

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p.309

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p.311

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. pp.313-314

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. pp.319-321

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. pp.328-329



<sup>170</sup> Ibid. pp.340-341

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p.342

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p.353

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p.357

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. pp. 363-364

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p.367

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. p.371

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 375

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 383

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 387

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p. 404

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p. 423

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. p. 426

<sup>183</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Eqd Al-Jeed* (with Urdu translation), Delhi, pp.76-80

<sup>184</sup> *Fatoohat-e Makkiah*, Chapter 155

<sup>185</sup> See, *Al-Muafiqat* by Shatibi, vol.4, p.202

Some of the utterances by the jurists would make one believe that the majority of them consider choosing the easiest option (*tatabba' rakhs*) to be forbidden. The fact, however, is that like other matters there is considerable disagreement about this as well. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal says that if a person follows the statements by the inhabitants of Medina regarding wine and the ability of the dead to hear, respectively and the statement by the inhabitants of Mecca regarding temporary marriage (*muta'*), then he would be declared a *face*. Abu ICQ Maui says that if a follower (*muqallid*) picks and chooses the easiest provisions from all the schools of jurisprudence, then he would be declared a *fasiq*, whereas Ibn Abi Hurairah does not consider any such person to be a *fasiq*. According to Ibn Abdul Salam, the person's act would be taken into consideration; if he did anything that is impermissible he would be a sinner, otherwise not.

While a profound scholar like Shatibi strongly opposes choosing the easiest option (see, *Muafiqat*, vol.4, p.145), Ibn Humam strongly supports it. (see, *Fathul Qadeer* by Ibn Humam, Egypt, vol.6, pp.360-361)

<sup>186</sup> See, *Kifayatul Mufti* (Edicts of Mufti Kifayatullah), vol. 6, pp. 236-237

<sup>187</sup> We are here presenting some examples of this contradiction in the world of thinking from a famous publication of the initial period. This is none other than *Kitab Al-Umm*, the famous work by Shafei:

- (1) For example, the Shafeiite point of view regarding the procedure of the purchase is as follows: 'Under this condition, sale will be obligatory on the parties and the procedure of sale can be cancelled only under these conditions -- in case the product is defective, right to view (i.e., if the buyer discovers some defect in the product after seeing it) or due to condition laid

down earlier.' It is, however, recorded just after this that 'it is reported (by Rabi') that Imam Shafei opted for the right to see.' (*Al-Umm*, vol.3, Beirut, Darul Ma'refah, p.3)

- (2) Now, take up the case of investment. If a sword is gold-plated and the value of the gold is equal to the value of the silver, or it is plated with gold as well as silver, it cannot be bartered for gold or silver. It has to be bought on its own right (*ardan*). However, this point of view is negated later. According to Rabi's report, Shafei is of the view that it is unlawful to buy a thing which contains silver or a thing resembling gold, for example, a gilded page, because the buyer does not know the actual amount of the money invested in it. (*Al-Umm*, p.33, op.cit)
- (3) Now, consider the matter concerning a person who owes as much debt as he possesses wealth. Is zakah obligatory on him or not? Shafei is of the opinion that if a person owns one thousand dirham and owes debt equal to the amount of money he has, *zakah* is not obligatory on him. On the contrary, as reported by Rabi, Shafei is of the opinion that if a person has one thousand dirham and owes debt equal to the amount he possesses, *zakah* is obligatory on him. Rabi says if a person possesses property and wealth that however he loses with the passage of time, he is the real owner of the same. Despite being a debtor, he can waive the amount that someone owes to him. (*Al-Umm*, vol.7, Beirut, Darul Ma'refah, p.143)
- (4) As recorded in *Al-Umm*, if the husband lies as regards his lineage to his wife before the marriage, and the wife discovers the truth afterwards, the husband deserves punishment. Regarding this, Shafei has two statements. The first is that the woman has the right of choice. If she wills she can keep the marriage contract intact, or she may break it off. The second statement is that in this situation the marriage contract will be null and void. While according to the first statement the woman has the right of choice, the second statement stipulates that the marriage contract will stand broken off. (*Al-Umm*, vol.5, p.83)

<sup>188</sup> Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Maqaddama Tadween Fiqh*, p.158

It is said that disagreements among jurists made things easier and more convenient for the believers. It is a strange logic! It is like placing the clergy in the position of God; accord holiness to ten or twenty jurists and they would be the sources of some more conveniences!

The Israelites, too, had made their religious lives easier through such juristic disagreements. Take, for instance, the issue of divorce. Like the school of jurisprudence patronised by *ahl-e sunnat*, here also one finds the convenience of the 'privilege to differ':

If a man vows he will not have intercourse with his wife, the school of Shammai allows him two weeks, the school of Hillel one week (Keth, v. 6) and if by the end of that period he does not annul his vow and resume cohabitation, he is compelled to divorce her. (*Everyman's Talmud*, p.169)

Similarly, look at the juristic disagreements on the issue of women's education. To one school it is not only permissible but even obligatory, to another school of thought, it is forbidden and condemnable:

'One teacher declared: 'A man is obliged to have his daughter taught Torah' but this statement is immediately followed by the opposing view; whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as though he taught her obscenity' (Sot, III, 4) ... One Rabbi asserted, 'let the words of the Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women' (p. Sot. 19a); and we are informed that when a woman put a question to a Rabbi in connection with the Golden Calf, he told her, 'A woman has no learning except in the sue of spindle' (Joma 66 b). Quoted from *Everyman's Talmud*, p.179

<sup>189</sup> In the pages of history the image of Abu Hanifa one gets is that of a scholar of extraordinary brilliance who had the capacity to impress the audience with his wit and repartee. The author of *Uyoon Al-Hadaiq* has recorded his debates with Shabi, Taus and Ata who were counted among the teachers of Abu Hanifa. Khateeb in his *Tarikh-e Baghdad* has also mentioned some of Abu Hanifa's debates. One instance of his scholarly and intellectual debates with contemporary scholars is represented by his dialogue with Imam Awza'i in Mecca which was on the issue of raising hands (till they touch the earlobes), i.e., رفع يدين. Awza'i's stance was that the Hadith on this issue that is traced back to the Prophet through Zahri, Salim and Abdullah bin Omer, should have been enough to satisfy the jurists of Iraq as well. To refute this, Abu Hanifa offered a Hadith that has been narrated through a chain that included Hammad, Ibrahim Nakh'ei, Alqama and Abdullah bin Mas'ud to demonstrate that the Prophet would not undertake رفع يدين, i.e., he did not raise his hands up to the earlobes. Imam Awza'i is reported to have exclaimed, 'Subhanallah! I offered the Hadith narrated through Zahri, Salim and Abdullah, and you can offer nothing better than a Hadith with a chain of narrators like Hammad, Nakh'ei and Alqama'. Pat came Abu Hanifa's reply, 'Well, according to the standard established by you my transmitters are more knowledgeable than yours. Abdullah bin Mas'ud's depth and superiority of knowledge is crystal clear over those of Abdullah bin Omer, because the latter was just a youth during the Prophet's time whereas Abdullah bin Mas'ud had already reached maturity of consciousness.'

Another instance of Abu Hanifa's wit and repartee is said to have been represented by قراة خلف الإمام. It is said that one day a large number of people gathered around him to discuss the issue. Abu Hanifa said: 'How can I talk singly with all of you? It will be better if you choose one among yourselves who will represent your views adequately.' The people accepted his proposal. Abu Hanifa said: 'When you accepted my proposal, there is no need of any debate now. Just as one person can represent all of you, likewise, in salah, the imam abides by the same principle.'

Another incident of this kind has been recorded by many historians. It involves his dialogue with Zahaak Khareji. It is said that during the reign of the Umayyads, Zahaak had occupied Kufa with his supporters. As Abu Hanifa had a prominent position in the social life of Kufa, he also became his target. Zahaak came to him, and demanded, pointing his sword towards him, that he

should repent and reverse his stance that in his conflict with Muaviah Ali had accepted arbitration, despite the fact that he was on the side of Truth. Abu Hanifa said, 'If you are bent on killing me, it is another matter. But if you are doing it for defending the Truth, then you must allow me to present my point of view.' Zahaak accepted his proposal. Abu Hanifa asked, 'What could be done if we cannot reach any definitive decision after the debate?' Zahaak agreed that in such a situation he would have no objection in having a third person as arbitrator to resolve this issue. One of the companions of Zahaak was chosen for this role. Then Abu Hanifa said, 'Ali did exactly the same thing as you have done. Despite being convinced about his own stance, he agreed to accept arbitration.' It is said that Zahaak was stunned by the imam's extraordinary brilliance and considered it wise to slink away from there.

At a time when the importance of jurists and the traditionists was increasing in the society, when the extension of the Islamic empire and the relative prosperity of the people led to a conducive atmosphere for academic and intellectual discussions, and when, apart from the political power, many institutes of learning were being set up through social initiatives, they became the means for the common people for attaining upward social mobility and gain prominence. Whoever could win the confidence of the people, or whoever could vanquish his rival in a public gathering and could thus impress the audience with a display of his erudition, could achieve fame and adulation. In the educational environment of the period when the tasks of writing, editing or compiling were still at a nascent state, the public reputation of a jurist of the time or a traditionist depended entirely on his performance in public dialogues and debates. The success in these debates determined the profundity of the scholar in the eyes of the people. It is said that when Qatadah Basari came to Kufa, he got it declared publicly that he would like to answer any question put to him by the inhabitants of Kufa. Anyone could ask him whatever question he wanted. In other words, it was a kind of advertisement to the effect that if the inhabitants of Kufa had any reservations about accepting his social status as a great scholar, they could remove their doubts in a public assembly. Historians have recorded that because of Qatadah's fame and his extraordinary social status, a vast assembly of people gathered. Abu Hanifa, too, was present among the audience and he made life difficult for Qatadah by asking him a host of very difficult questions. One of his questions pertaining to jurisprudence was as follows: A man went on a journey. After a few years came the news of his death; his wife remarried and had had a child born to her. After sometime the first husband returned and he refused to accept the child as his own, while the second husband claimed it to be his. In such a situation, would it be considered that both men were accusing the woman of adultery, or only the man who was refusing to be the child's father? Qatadah was flummoxed by this strange and complex question. He asked whether such a situation had indeed taken place. Abu Hanifa answered, 'Not yet. But the ulema should be equipped with answers for all potential situations.' The defeat of Qatadah in the debate on questions of jurisprudence compelled him to run for cover to the realm of exegetical interpretation. Here also, Abu Hanifa confronted him with a

problem for which he had no satisfactory answer. Commenting on the verse – قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ – قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ he narrated the same old story according to which Sulaiman had a minister who is said to have known إسم اعظم and had offered to have Bilqis' thrown brought in the twinkling of an eye. Abu Hanifa asked, 'Did Sulaiman himself know إسم اعظم?' to which Qatadah answered in the negative. Abu Hanifa strongly criticised this reply and said, 'Can anyone be there in the age of a prophet who knew more than the prophet?' Qatadah was again flummoxed by this question and could not say anything in reply. Then he said, 'Leave these tales aside, and let us talk on the articles of Faith.' Abu Hanifa asked him, 'Are you a believer?' to which Qatadah replied, 'insha Allah'. Abu Hanifa said, 'What is the justification of saying 'insha Allah' here? When Abraham was asked, 'are you a believer' (أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن) he had said in reply – بَلَى.' Qatadah was thoroughly frustrated by his defeat and left the assembly.

Such accounts of dialogues have been recorded in considerable details in Khateeb's *Tarikh-e Baghdad* and Hafiz Abul Mohasin's *Uqood Al-Jam'an* as make it clear that in the context of religious learning, particularly jurisprudence, these dialogues had the entire community of scholars in their grip. A person wanted to convince people about his leadership, his friends and disciples supported him to the hilt and spread propaganda about him. The community of students considered it their duty to impress people with the profound learning and erudition of their teachers. The crowds pulled by the teachers determined the educational status of students. To outwit the opponent, the rival party would ask such imaginary and far-fetched questions that had no connection with reality. This also becomes apparent to us in the context of the personal tussle between Abu Hanifa and Yahya bin Sai'd Al-Ansari. It is said that Yahya who had a prominent position in the court of Mansoor Abbasi and who was the judge of Kufa was not able to achieve the status as that of Abu Hanifa in the eyes of the people of Kufa. Abu Hanifa and his students did not accept the superiority of Yahya in learning and did not recognise his social and political importance. One day Abu Hanifa sent some of his brilliant students, among whom Abu Yusuf and Zafar have been mentioned prominently by historians, for debate with Yahya and his students. The topic for the debate was – if a slave was owned by two masters one of whom wanted to make him free, could he do so? Qazi Yahya's stance was that, according to the principle of – لا ضرر ولا ضرار – he could not do so. And because, in the particular circumstances, the second owner had the ضرر, so one party could not be given the right to take such a decision unilaterally. Abu Yusuf asked – 'if the second owner also wants to free the slave?' Yahya replied, 'then it will be permissible and the slave will be set free.' This reply by Yahya made Abu Yusuf feel as though he had won the debate. He said, 'You are contradicting your own statement. When the slave cannot be free after the first owner freed him, how can he be free when the second owner frees him? Because this will render the decision of the first owner infructuous.' Abu Yusuf's finer argument and psychological assault must have stunned Qazi Yahya. We do not know whether after this encounter the rivalry between these two contemporary jurists became more pronounced and what kind of implications such events had for the society of that

time. However, what is clear from such dialogues and debates is that in the first few centuries of Islam, the ulema and specialists have been engaged in a host of unnecessary debates and hair-splitting. Some of their speculations were so unnecessary and ludicrous that it could only be termed as mere wastage of time. It has been reported that one-day several stalwarts of jurisprudence like Abu Hanifa, Sufian Thawri, Ibn Abi Laila and Sharik were together in an assembly. The topic under discussion was – if a snake suddenly enters in an assembly of several people, coils around one of them who flings it to some other and then that person to someone else, and so on; when the snake is hurled at the last person it bites that person and the person dies. In such a situation who would be responsible for the death of that person and pay the blood money? Someone said that all of them would have to pay the blood money, some other said that it is only the first person who is responsible. In this assembly of great jurists, each member held a different view. Abu Hanifa who had been silent and smiling all the while said that when the first person hurled the snake on the second person and the second person remained unhurt, the first person was exempted from the responsibility. Similarly, the second and third person were also exempted from responsibility. Now as for the person who hurled the snake on the last person, there are two conditions: if the snake bit the person immediately then he would be responsible, but if the snake bit the person after sometime then he also would be exempted from responsibility. Because in the latter case, the biting of the snake was the result of the person's own laziness, as he did not show the same alacrity like the others in defending himself.

A similarly speculative issue was – if a person takes the vow that if he takes the bath to remove his impurity that day, then it will amount to three talaqs on his wife. The same person says after some time that his wife will stand divorced if he misses any salah that day, and then he says that if he does not have sex with his wife, then she will be divorced. Such a person clearly makes a mockery of his conjugal life. He does not have any sense of the dignity of family life and keeps swearing and taking vows on trivial things. Rather than reprimanding or punishing such a person for his self-inflicted complications, the jurists of the time suggested him ways to wriggle out of his reprehensible acts and utterances. In other words, the basic function of jurisprudence that had come to offer guidance to people in the light of the Qur'an in organising the activities of their lives, was reduced to a mere game. We do not know whether it is an unjust accusation against the people of that time or, whether Abu Hanifa's rivals had recorded such events in books of history to undermine his extraordinary acumen. It is said that when people sought Abu Hanifa's opinion on this issue, he untied the knots of the vows one after another with such dexterity that the questioners could not but be amazed at his brilliance. He said – the person can have sex with his wife after *asr* prayer, then after taking the bath he should perform the *maghrib* prayer. In this way all his vows would be kept, and conditions fulfilled, i.e., having sex with his wife, not to miss prayer and undertaking the purifying bath at the end of the day.

A similar incident relates to a hot-tempered couple. The wife had vowed not to talk to her husband till he had spoken to her. Exactly the same vow was taken by the husband too. The

husband then ran to Sufian Thawri in panic who opined that they must pay penance for their vows. The same person then went to Abu Hanifa and urged him to find some means through which they could be saved from paying the penance. Abu Hanifa is reported to have said to the person to go and talk to his wife, and that there was no need of any penance. Abu Hanifa's argument was – when the wife had addressed her husband to warn him that she would not talk to him as long as he wouldn't, she had already initiated talking. So there was no need to pay penance for beginning the talk.

Such incidents are legion that have been narrated to underline the extraordinary intelligence of Abu Hanifa. For further details, see, Shibli Nomani, *Sirat Al-Noman*, Azamgarh.

<sup>190</sup> The jurists thought of the following stratagem to get around this problem: if one has to buy silver with silver, and has to pay more silver coins, in that case he can mix them with coins of other kinds. 'If for difference in value, one has to pay more or less, then one can mix some money to bring it to appropriate value.' For example, if the buyer has to buy ten rupees worth of silver jewel, he can pay nine rupees in silver coins and the remaining one rupee in brass coins or in coins of lesser denominations. In this way, the payment made in excess will not be counted as interest. (See, Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *Risala Safaei Muamelaat*, p.18, quoted in 'Jawaz sood ma' fatawa Syed Tufail Ahmad Manglori', Badayun, Nizami Press, 1935, p.33)

Similarly, the jurists also suggested a stratagem for taking interest from banks. One can deposit money in the form of coins or sovereigns in banks, but while withdrawing it he can take the money in the form of bank notes. In this way, the medium of currency will change and the injunctions regarding usury will not be applicable. (Quoted in *ibid.*, p.32)

<sup>191</sup> This kind of transaction has remained a matter of dispute among jurists, though there is no disagreement about the permissibility of the transaction itself. Such examples can be easily found in the familiar books of jurisprudence such as *Fatawa Qazi Khan*, *Bahr Al-Raiq*, *Durre Mukhtar*, *Alamgiri* and so on.

<sup>192</sup> *Fatawa Qazi Khan*, vol.2, p.117

<sup>193</sup> In the terms used by jurists, *nikah fazuli* is a marriage where formal permission from the husband is not taken. Of course, he can convey his consent either through paying the bride money (*mehr*), or by having sex with the woman or through accepting congratulations on the marriage from others.

If a man says to his wife – 'If I marry another woman then you will be divorced', and then wants to marry another woman, the jurists suggested that he can undertake *nikah fazuli*. In other words, rather than making a public declaration of the marriage, he should take the short cut of *nikah fazuli*. Later, he can convey his consent by paying up the bride money or having sex with her. In this way he would not be required to pay penance for the breaking of vow.

(See, *Mufti Kifayatullah ke Fatawe*, vol.6, p.309; *Fatawa Razawiya*, vol.5, pp.804-805)

<sup>194</sup> To the Hanafites, giving orchards on lease is not considered permissible. As a way out of this, rather than the orchards, the sale of the fruits on a prospective rough estimate was suggested.

See, Ibn Najim, *Al-Ishtibah wal-Nazaer*, published in Egypt, p.41

<sup>195</sup> See, Kassaf, *Kitab Al-Heel*, Cairo, 1314 hijra, p.90

<sup>196</sup> To deprive the neighbour of the right of first refusal Khassaf suggested the following trick: The house should be bequeathed in the name of the buyer, and then the buyer can pay off the price in exchange of the gift. Thus, the injunction regarding the right of first refusal of the neighbour will not be applicable. (See, Khassaf, *Kitab Al-Heil*, op. cit. p.180

<sup>197</sup> See, Ghazali, *Kimiya-e Sa'dat*, tr. by Muhammad Saidur Rahman Alvi, Lahore, p.460

<sup>198</sup> *Alamgiri*, vol.4, p.1044; *Hidayah*, vol.4, p.859

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.336

<sup>201</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.455; *Alamgiri*, vol.4, p.1041; *Hidayah*, vol.4, p.857

<sup>202</sup> *Durre Mukhtar*, vol.1, p.436; *Hidayah*, vol.4, p.858

<sup>203</sup> *Alamgiri*, vol.4, p.1043; *Hidayah*, vol.4, p.858

<sup>204</sup> Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilvi justifies the selling of a ten-rupee note for twelve rupees for the duration of one year by saying that it is permissible if both the parties think in terms of sale and not in terms of borrowing. This is because an increase in the principal amount and prescribing a period are both permissible. (*Al-Fiqh Al-Mafahim*, pp.111-112)

It has been said in *Fatawa Alamgiri*, with reference to Imam Abu Yusuf, that undertaking such means not only allows believers to earn profit without taking recourse to usury, and by doing so they even deserve to earn merit. (*Alamgiri*, vol.2, pp.279-280)

<sup>205</sup> In different periods of history many Islamic scholars have raised their voice against the concept of jurisprudence as an autonomous entity. In the words of Shah Waliullah: لم نؤمن بفقهاء أيا كان أنه أوحى الله إليه الفقه وفرض علينا طاعته وأنه معصوم فان اقتدينا بواحد منهم فذلك لعلمنا بأنه عالم بكتاب الله وسنة رسوله. (*Hujjatullah Al-Balegha*, op. cit)

translation: Whoever the jurisprudent, we did not ever accept that Allah has revealed jurisprudence to him and that adherence to it is obligatory for us, and that he is innocent (of sins). On the contrary, if we follow any one of them, it is due to the fact that he is a scholar of Allah's Book and the Prophet's sunnah.

In the words of Mulla Ali Qari: It is a known fact that Allah did not compel anyone to become either a Shafeiite, or a Hanafite, or a Malekite or a Hanbalite. Rather, He has ordained them to practise sunnah (ومن المعلوم أن الله سبحانه وتعالى ما كلف أحدا أن يكون حنفيا أو مالكيا أو شافعيا أو حنبليا بل (كلفهم أن يعملوا بالسنة

<sup>206</sup> See, *Kitab al-Umm* by Shafei, 'Kitab Ibtal Al-Istihsan', vol.7

<sup>207</sup> It is Shafei who is, to a large extent, responsible for making jurisprudence such a complicated affair. He not only accorded reliability to the role of the practices and reports in the study of and reflection on the Qur'an that was constantly on the increase but also tried to build a structure of jurisprudence based on these foundations. Considered from this perspective, Shafei played a key role in making Revelation subservient to reports and making the interpretation of the Faith a



complex art of jurisprudence. Even though he was brought up in the climate of Abu Hanifa's non-conventional school of jurisprudence, he had imbibed the tradition of jurisprudence from Muhammad bin Hasan Al-Shaibani. Malik was among his direct teachers. But till then, jurisprudence was taken to mean logical deductions from the Revelation and the Prophetic model. Every person, depending on his own understanding and scholarship, regarded himself entitled to undertake such a task. One finds evidence of a general climate of discourse and reflection on matters of Faith in the Muslim society. Neither was any Islamic scholar given a sacred status, nor the seats of learning occupied by famous scholars were regarded as anything more than institutions of learning. And then, because scholars of such a level were there in different towns and cities, no one ever entertained the idea that his institution should codify such principles of the interpretation of the Faith that would be regarded as immutable in the coming years. However, when Shafei tried to treat jurisprudence as an art and when he, on the strength of his overwhelming dominance in religious debates and dialogues, declared the method of worship adopted by the Islamic scholars of both Iraq and Hijaz to be unreliable, and instead of the old, non-formal juristic assemblies, laid the foundation of a formal discipline of jurisprudence and formed its laws and regulations, then, for the first time, jurisprudence assumed the dimension of a branch of learning that could be undertaken only by the specialists. It was natural for common people to stay away from this branch that was getting more and more technical. The result was – the specialist scholars established their monopoly on the branch of the erstwhile non-formal learning that was the centre of attention for the general people for understanding Revelation. Karabisi says that it was Shafei who familiarised the terms of jurisprudence for the first time. Before him people were not familiar with such terms as the Book, the sunnah or consensus in the senses in which jurists used them. After the selection of new terms, the determination of their meanings and the compilation of principles, when Shafei made a survey of the conventional jurisprudence, he found all of it invalid according to the standard of testing established by him. While on the one hand, whether it was Abu Hanifa or Ibn Abi Laila, whether it was Waqidi or Auza'i, the codification of these new principles of jurisprudence dismissed all their learned contributions in the field as unreliable, on the other, their historical statures were determined on the basis of these principles. Through the codification of these principles Shafei had, as it were, took the first step in institutionalising the erstwhile non-formal methods of *tafaqqoh*. This, in the coming years, became an inevitable reference point for the interpretation of the Faith.

Shafei's *Adalla Shar'i*, which he considers to constitute a perfect body of the principles of jurisprudence provided an ideological support for the institution of ulema or interpreters of the Faith in comparison with which the other institutions of the interpretations of the Faith became comparatively less genuine and less reliable. The five sources of evidence that Shafei considered essential for drawing commandments are: first, the Book and the sunnah where sunnah and the Book are placed side by side); second, consensus; third, the opinions of the Prophet's Companions; fourth, the views of the Prophet's Companions that are closer to the Book and the

sunnah; and fifth, a kind of *qiyas* that has its basis in the Book, the sunnah, the consensus and the sayings of the Prophet's Companions. The way these five sources of evidence have been defined ensured the monopoly of interpretation for a group to be known as ulema or jurists, and who, according to Shafei, would discharge the duty of *fardh-e kifaya* on behalf of the entire ummah. Firstly, in defining the Book and the sunnah, as the Book was made subservient to sayings and practices, it was considered necessary for the interpreter of the Faith that he should be both a historian as well as a traditionist. And that he should be equipped to undertake a kind of synthesis between conflicting reports. As for the issues where no clear commandments are available in the Book or the sunnah, they should be resolved through the consensus of scholars and jurists having special knowledge or expertise in the area. As for the viewpoints of the of the Prophet's companions, their acceptance was made contingent upon the fact that the view of one companion should not go against the view of another on the same issue. If there was any difference between the opinions of two companions, then the opinion closer to the Book and the sunnah should be preferred. Ostensibly, the five sources of evidence seem to point to a very cautious approach and it seems that through establishing such parameters Shafei wanted to establish a rigorous standard. However, in practice, there was enough material for the negation of this target in them. It seems somewhat strange that those who do not give precedence to the opinions of the members of the Prophet's family over their own should sit in judgment to decide, in a situation of disagreement, about what view was closer to the Book and the sunnah. We can have precedence over the views of the Prophet's Companions only when we agree, unquestioningly, on the fact that we understand our *qiyas* or *ijtihad* better than them, or we consider ourselves better placed, in terms of contemporaneity, to interpret the Faith. Then the fact that, in a situation of disagreement, the views of the Prophet's Companions should be subjected to criticism and scrutiny while, on the contrary, the consensus of the experts should be accepted unquestioningly, and this consensus, which is entirely a product of human intellect and ratiocination, should be accorded the status of *nass*. No one can guarantee the authenticity of the issues drawn from such juristic principles; however, it has led to a situation where all the rights of logical deduction have slipped out of the hands of the sincere seekers of the Faith and fell into the hands of a group that has made the interpretation of the Faith an immensely complicated activity on the strength of the use of specific terms or jargons. After compiling and codifying the principles of jurisprudence, Shafei transformed jurisprudence into an immensely complex branch of art and learning which demanded that for this task a group of specialist should come to the fore who would not only be superior to common people but also should enjoy a kind of religious authority amongst the majority of Muslims. In corroboration of this idea Shafei classified knowledge into two categories: common knowledge and specialised knowledge. In the category of common knowledge were only those duties and limits that find mention in the Qur'an and about which there is no disagreement among the members of the ummah. There is error of report or interpretation involved here. Therefore, all Muslims should know about them. As far as the

specialised knowledge is concerned, it is not available as injunctions (*nass*) in the Qur'an and the sunnah, and so it has enough scope for inference (*qiyas*) and interpretation. Shafei expresses the view that some individuals should devote themselves totally to this specialised knowledge which would exempt other members of the ummah for this *fardh-e kifayah*. Thus, after Shafei presented the principles of jurisprudence as such a complex art, the mergence of a specialized agency became inevitable.

<sup>208</sup> The interpretation of jurists have built such a hedge around the Revelation which is very difficult to penetrate, at least, through the means of the conventional Muslim thinking. However, those who are in favour of *ijtihad* and who, in the history of Muslim thought spread over centuries, have raised their voice time again in support of it, have always thought in terms of *ijtihad* in ancillary or collateral matters (*ijtihad-e faru'i*). Or, at best, they expressed the view that there is scope for drawing of inferences internally, within the principles of jurisprudence put forward by the four imams. In other words, these gentlemen are in favour of the possibility of innovative imitators (*mujtahid muqallid*) like Abu Yusuf and Muhammad, but consider it wise to keep all the doors shut to the possibility of the mergence of another Abu Hanifa or Shafei, because there is no longer any need for original thinking in the realm of principles (*ijtihad fil-usool*) or the perfect *mujtahid* (*mujtahid-e matlaq*). (Hafiz Ibn Hajar has recorded this with reference to Ibn Salah). Jalaluddin Sayuti is also seen to be complaining about this disappearance of the perfect *mujtahid*, although he seems to welcome this idea, because, according to him, there is no need for any such individual now, and if anyone tries to make such an attempt, it would not be permissible. Sayuti, *Al-Radd a'la man Akhlaq*, p.96.

Some Islamic scholars do not consider it reasonable to think anew about the principles of jurisprudence simply because of the fact that those principles had been formulated by the pious Predecessors, hence it is not permissible at any time to formulate new principles in opposition to them. In the words of Ashraf Ali Thanavi, 'It is not permissible to draw inferences on the details already inferred by earlier jurists, as they were superior to us in learning, piety, abstinence, devotion, i.e., in everything. So, in case of disagreement, their views would get precedence.' (*Dawat Abdiyat*, p. 104). At another place, he goes so far as to say that the principles and methods of the Predecessors are so complete and self-sufficient that, till the Day of Judgement, there can be no problem under the sun whose justification or otherwise, even in matters of detail, cannot be drawn from these principles (Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *Ashraf Al-Jawab*, vol. 2, p. 312). In this context, other people say that in the changing situation in the modern times when there is total confusion in the world of Muslim thought, opening the doors of *ijtihad* would lead to more conflicts. That is why, during the period of decline, it is reasonable to sustain the four conventional schools of jurisprudence. If we could only understand that the basic reason for our decline is the mergence of the four schools of jurisprudence and their mantle of sacredness, and that they do not have any credentials to take us out of the quagmire of decline in which we have sunk! It is strange that we are regarding the cause of the ailment as its remedy.

- <sup>209</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, edited and annotated by M. Saeed Shaikh, Lahore, 1986
- <sup>210</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p.134; also see, Shatibi, *Al-Muafiqat*, vol.4
- <sup>211</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p.134
- <sup>212</sup> Jawed Iqbal, *Zinda Rawad*, Lahore, vol.3, Lahore, 1984, pp.348- 349
- <sup>213</sup> During the composition of his address on ijihad, Iqbal had the book of the American author N. P. Agnides, *Mohammedan Theories of Finance* (New York: 1916) in mind, where the erudite author has expressed the view that the *nass* can certainly be abrogated through consensus, as also held by some Mu'tazelite and Hanafite scholars. To confirm this Iqbal had written a letter to Syed Sulaiman Nadwi to know whether such views can be found in our tradition. Sulaiman Nadwi replied that the view expressed by the American writer was wrong. However, Aamadi has written in *Ahkam* that unlike some Mu'tazelites, it is commonly believed that consensus cannot abrogate *nass*. This was the wrong-headed idea of some Mu'tazelite scholars which could not be accepted. We do not know why Sulaiman Nadwi did not quote the whole extract from Aamadi where it had been written that some Mu'tazelites and Isa bin Aban were in favour of this view that the *nass* can be abrogated through consensus. It should be kept in mind that Isa bin Aban (d.221 hijra) was a famous Hanafite judge who was known for his writings on Hanafite jurisprudence that are considered reliable. Abdul Aziz Al-Bukhari has also written it in *Kashaf Al-Israr* that Isa bin Aban was of the view that consensus could abrogate both the Qur'an and Hadiths. (See, Abdul Aziz Al-Bukhari, *Kashaf Al-Israr*, vol.3, Constantinople: 1307 hijra, pp.895-896; also see, Muhammad Khalid Masood, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad*, pp.188-189)
- <sup>214</sup> Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi has recorded the view from his teacher, Sulaiman Ali Nadwi. See, *Naqoosh-e Iqbal*, Karachi: 1973, p.40
- <sup>215</sup> Abdul Majid Daryabadi, 'Iqbal', *Iqbaliat-e Majid*, Hyderabad: Iqbal Academy, 1979, p.9
- <sup>216</sup> Maulana Azad has also reached a similar conclusion. He writes: 'The historian of Islam can never stop lamenting the fact that the cause of the first and the last invasion of the Tartars was the ignorant bigotry and sectarianism of the Muslims. That is to say, disaster first entered through the mutual clashes between the Hanafites and the Shafeiites, and the climax of this disaster symbolised by the sack of Baghdad was the result of the tussle between the Shias and the Sunnis. Chengiz Khan had conquered the upper parts of the Middle East up to Khwarizm (i.e., upto Geneva), but could not advance further. In later years, when the empire was divided among his grand children, the Middle East and the surrounding areas fell in the share of Halaku Khan. But he also did not dare to advance further, because the grandeur of the Islamic empire spread over six centuries still created awe in people's minds. However, in the mean time, an incident took place that opened the door for Halaku Khan's advance and conquest. In Khorasan, the Hanafites and the Shafeiites were engaged in a battle of attrition. The Hanafites invited Halaku Khan to revenge themselves upon the Shafeiites, and opened the gates of the town. Then when the Tartars

began to use their swords, they made no distinction between the Hanafites and the Shafeiites. They put an end to both.'

<sup>217</sup> For example, under the Hanafite school of jurisprudence it was not possible for the wife to demand maintenance for the period gone by, although, under the new law, following the Shafeiite school of jurisprudence, the maintenance of the wife has been designated as a kind of debt. Also, if the husband, for some reason, cannot provide for the wife, then she has been given the right to demand separation. Moreover, if the husband is inflicted with any permanent ailment, following the Malekite jurisprudence, she has been given the right to demand separation. For the missing husband, the waiting period for the wife has been reduced to four, after which the wife can marry.

(Tanzilur Rahman, 'Introduction', *Majmu'a Qawaneen Islam*, vol.1, pp.9-10)

<sup>218</sup> Tanzilur Rahman, 'Introduction', *Majmu'a Qawaneen Islam*, vol.1, p.15

<sup>219</sup> *ibid.* p.17

<sup>220</sup> For an idea of the interminable tussle among the Islamic scholars on this issue, see, Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafei, *Jawaher Al-fiqh*, vol.5, p.127-216

<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*, pp.275- 287

<sup>222</sup> The justification of medical injection, particularly for injecting glucose etc. into the body, in the state of fasting has been provided in his writings by Maulana Muhammad Shafei of Darul Uloom Deoband, a bastion of conventional and conservative thinking. And his views have been corroborated by the famed Islamic scholars of the time such as Ashraf Ali Thanavi, Husain Ahmad Madani and Muhammad Aijaz Ali etc.

(For details, see, *Jawaher Al-fiqh*, vol. 5, Deoband: 1991, pp.249-253

<sup>223</sup> *Jawaher Al-fiqh*, vol.5, p.205

<sup>224</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p.221

<sup>225</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Modernism*, p.329

## SECTION VI

<sup>1</sup> Later, this thought gave birth to the batini movement which attached great importance to the hidden meaning of the text. The Fatimides who came to power in Egypt and who are known today as Ismaeli sect were zealous exponents of this view.

<sup>2</sup> Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi, *Fatoohat Makkiyah* (Urdu translation), Rawalpindi (Punjab), vol. I, part II, Chapter 25, p.639

Instead of approaching the Qur'an as a book of guidance people began to read it as a book where one derived the knowledge of ما كان وما يكون. This was the kind of notion that misled the scholars of the Israelites through the Torah. The expression – بَيِّنَاتٌ لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ – which implied that the Qur'an provided the perfect guidance, and that humanity needed no additional sources for its guidance, led some scholars to conjecture that one could gain the knowledge of whatever happened in the world and whatever was likely to happen from this Book. This sort of misconception about the Qur'an totally changed the import of the Divine Revelation in the eyes of the common people.

Now each verse of the Qur'an did not mean what it appeared to mean, but so many layers of meanings were seen hidden in it that what to speak of the ordinary people it was difficult even for experts in the field to explore and unravel all the meanings. According to Mulla Ali Qari who has quoted the statements of some scholars in *Mirqah*, each verse of the Qur'an had sixty thousand possible and potential meanings. A report attributed to Ali had him declare, 'If I want I can load the backs of seventy camels with the commentaries of the Qur'an.' In some other reports attributed to the Prophet, the narrators had him say, 'If I want I can load the backs of seventy camels with the commentaries of only Surah *Fateha*.' Allama Ahmad Raza Khan has recorded it with references to some elders that if they began to gather the commentaries of – مَا نَسَخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ – one hundred thousand camels would be burdened with it and yet the commentaries would not be exhausted. He has recorded it on the authority of some auliya that each letter of the Qur'an was invested with forty million meanings. It was also said on the authority of some Sardar Ali Khawas that when Allah bestowed him with knowledge of the meanings of Surah *Fateha*, he became privy to the knowledge of forty thousand nine hundred and ninety subjects. It was also said, with reference to Imam Shirani's ميزان الشريعة الكبيرة that his brother, Afzaluddin had drawn the knowledge of two lakh forty seven thousand nine hundred and ninety nine subjects from Surah *Fateha*, then he impelled all of them towards 'bismillah', then he impelled them to the letter 'ba' of 'bismillah' and lastly, he impelled them towards the dot beneath the letter 'ba'. The same Fazaluddin claimed that if he wanted he could load the backs of eighty camels with the knowledge of the dot!

Those who tried to read the Qur'an as the book of ما كان وما يكون treated it not as the Book of Guidance but as a text of benedictions. It has been said with reference to Sayuti and Jawini that from the expression – الم غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ – some scholars had already determined the year of the triumph over Baitul Maqdis. It is difficult to authenticate such statements historically, but the increased frequency of them made a segment of the ummah believe that the Qur'an could also be used to forecast the future.

See, Ahmad Raza Khan, الدولة المكية بالمادة الغيبية, Karachi, 1955, pp. 279 -285

<sup>3</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Ahya Uloom Al-Deen*, Egypt, 1352 hijra, vol. I, p. 88

<sup>4</sup> 'Bal Al-Ilm,' *Bukhari*

<sup>5</sup> Khizr, known in traditional Muslim thinking as Khizr Alaihissalam, is a fictional character. Neither his name has ever been mentioned in the Qur'an nor is it familiar with anyone except unreliable narrative commentators. The entire character of Khizr has been constructed around عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا. In the Qur'anic paradigm the reference to the friend of Moses is only of peripheral importance. However, this reference allowed the mystics and the commentators with a flair for story telling to construct a spiritual figure who has been supposed to help mystics in all ages. The fictional personality of Khizr is that of a living Sheikh with the power of miracles, and he has precedence over even the prophets in the knowledge of divine secrets. In his *Anfas Al-Arifeen*, Shah Waliullah offers argument in favour of Khizr and his emergence from time to time. In

*Futoohat Makkiyah* Ibn Arabi has described his meeting with him in clear terms and in great details. He saw at the port of Tunis that a person was walking on the water under the full moon but his feet did not have the bare trace of water on them. Khizr traversed the distance of two miles in two or three steps, climbed on a minaret on a high hill and got absorbed in the worship and meditation of God. In another account, Ibn Arabi has described Khizr performing salah in the wind, far above the ground. Ibn Arabi further claimed that Khizr himself placed the robe of mysticism on him, and, among the mystics, gifting of the robe represents bestowing mentorship on the disciple. Thus, if the mystics considered themselves equipped with greater occult knowledge than the learning that came through the Prophet, it is quite in accord with the notion according to which Khizr enjoys precedence over Moses.

We feel that the concept of Khizr has been borrowed from the Jewish and Christian sources. Ibn Taimiyah has discovered that a famous prayer house of the Jews was named after Khizr. The notion that the concept of Khizr came from Jewish and Christian sources also seems credible because in Muslim thinking, the first reference to Khizr came through Wahb bin Munabbah. Ibn Hajar has quoted it from Wahb bin Munabbah's book, *Al-Mubtada* that in his age also people claimed to have seen Khizr. (*Al-Esaba*, vol.I, p.117)

Commentators with a flair for story telling have pegged all kinds of conjectures on the fictional character of Khizr. Muqatil has tried to convince people that he was a prophet. It is said that he is named Khizr because, according to a report traced to the Prophet, once when he was sitting in the desert the earth beneath him began to recede and vegetation sprouted. Mujahid says that he was called Khizr because wherever he performed salah, green shoots would sprout around the place. Some other people surmised that this was because, perhaps, he used to wear green robes, green colour being an important symbol in mysticism. Some Sufis attempted to prove that Khizr was the spiritual guide of a person who, despite being placed in the exalted position of spirituality, was still a victim of personal vanity and committed deeds that were undesirable in the eyes of Islam. And this is what Khizr is seen to do with the personality of Moses. However, all such data from different sources fail to portray the actual person with a personality of his own. Thus, the popular tales about Khizr, as opposed to the information coming through the above commentaries, seem more reliable and acceptable. Some say that Khizr was the son of Adam, some call him the grandson of Pharaoh. There is also considerable dispute about the fact that whether the references to the 'good man' that one finds in the account related to Moses were meant for Khizr, or whether Khizr was a prophet or *wali* in the earlier times. According to the traditional ulema, Khizr, whoever he was, is no longer living on the earth now, as Imam Bukhari pointed out. However, among the mystics, one finds frequent references to their meeting with Khizr in the chronicles of different epochs. Ibn Taimiyah calls him a jinn whereas according to Ibn Qaiyim he is an angel (ملك من الملائكة) who takes on human forms. The accounts of meeting Khizr might be less frequent in our age, but in the period of Imam Nawawi, according to him, the majority of the people of that period believed that Khizr was alive and was present among

ordinary people. Despite being a fictional character, the reality is that in our traditional Muslim thinking, he is regarded as an agency of divine guidance and the last possible chain in this regard. Khizr, whether (and even if) he was a prophet or *wali*, for the mystic mind, the notion that he was privy to divine secrets and that he had precedence over Moses was a standing rebuke to the notion of the finality of prophethood (khatm-e nabuwwat).

<sup>6</sup> For example, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi says in one of his dream-like accounts that he saw Ali in dream saying to him that he had come to teach him the knowledge of the heavens.

*Maktoobat Imam Rabbani*, Hyderabad, Section I, Part I, p.99

<sup>7</sup> *Kitab Al-Lam'*, p.24

<sup>8</sup> Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi, *Fusoos Al-Hikam*, translated by Abdul Qadir Siddiqui, Hyderabad, 1944, p.69

<sup>9</sup> Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi, *Tafseer Shaikh Al-Akbar*, published in Egypt, 1317 hijra, relevant verse op. cit, pp.4-5

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48

<sup>12</sup> Like other Sufi Hadiths, this one too is highly unreliable, according to the traditionists. Asqalani says that according to Imam Nasei it is not a Hadith but a statement by Ibrahim bin Ila. One does not find any trace of this Hadith in the familiar books of Prophetic traditions.

This fabricated Hadith played a key role in shaping the concept of Islam offered by the mystics. This notion of the supposed Jihad-e Akbar has left extraordinary instances of extremism in thought and practice. Abu Bakr says, 'I kept on abnegating and tormenting myself for twelve years, and my heart was a mirror for myself to reflect on my actions for five years, and then I began to reflect over the two for one year. I still saw traces of kufr in myself. Twelve years were needed to cut them off. Even after it when I reflected I found the traces haunting me even in the occult realm. I meditated for five more years with the hope that I would find some ways to cut them off. Then something was revealed to me. When I looked at the creation I found it dead, and so, I raised four takbeers on it.' (*Risala Qushairiyah*). This struggle and strife with the hidden world led the mystics to a path which was closer to the ways of Christian monks, Hindu Sadhus and Budhhist bikshus, and whose bases were buried deep in non-Islamic cultures and literatures, and which was, from every angle, an alien implant on Islam.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Arabi, *Tafseer Al-Shaikh Al-Akbar*, op. cit, p.19

<sup>14</sup> To provide justification for the esoteric and the occult knowledge, Imam Ghazali made the following Hadith his basis: *إن من العلم كهينة المكنون لا يعلمه إلا أهل المعرفة بالله تعالى* (*Ehya Al-Uloom Al-deen*, vol.1, p.19). In general scholars and mystics have associated observation and commandment with the manifest and the hidden, even though, as a matter of fact, by observations (*mushahidat*) it is meant that these things have been made intelligible on the plane of human intellect through the means of similes. However, as the human intellect will get closer to felt knowledge, the meanings of the verses will gradually reveal themselves. As for the question that Allah has kept the knowledge of



observations reserved for some special persons dear to him who can understand Him through the light within them, to accept this would amount to going against the spirit of the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an time and again declares itself to be Perspicuous Book for the guidance of the the pious (هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ) and for the whole humanity (لِلنَّاسِ). Here there is no scope of any double meaning or ambiguity that would require the intervention of hidden knowledge or knowledge passed on from heart to heart.

<sup>15</sup> Abu Nasr Sarraj Tusi, *Kitab Al-Lam' fi al-Tasauuf*, translated by Dr Peer Muhammad Hasan, Islamabad, 1986, pp.4-5

<sup>16</sup> Abu Talib Makki, *Quwwat Al-Quloob*, published in Egypt, 1391 hijra, p.198

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>18</sup> Shah Waliullah has expressed this idea in his book, التفهيمات الإلهية. See, *Altafhimat-e Ilahiya*, Bijnor: Medina Press, 1936, vol.2, p.28; he expressed similar views in his book, *Fuyoodh Al-Haramain*. He says, 'There are two ways to reach Allah: one way is that which has come down through the Prophet to the creation ... the second one is between Allah and his slave ... actually, in this path, there is no intermediate course.' (*Fuyoodh Al-Haramain*, Delhi, 1305 hijra, p.50)

<sup>19</sup> Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi, *Futoohat-e Makkiyah*, Egypt, 1329, vol.2, p.253

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Arabi said that his *ilham* was of an inferior status than that of the Prophet. This is so because, according to him, in the *ilham* by the auliya a rapport is established between God and human beings through the heart, whereas Allah directly addresses the prophets. (*Futoohat*, Egypt, 1339 hijra, vol. 1, p. 57. However, there is no ambiguity in their belief that it is one and the same thing that is manifest in everyone, from Adam to Muhammad and all the auliya.

<sup>21</sup> Ghazali, *Kimiya-e Sa'dat*, p.13; *Ahya Al-Uloom*, published in Egypt, 1389 hijra, vol. III, p.16

<sup>22</sup> *Quwwat Al-Quloob*, p.134

<sup>23</sup> In *Zohar*, the greatly famous Jewish text of the thirteenth century, it is said that the basic objective of human life was 'merger with the Truth' (*fana fil-haq*). According to this concept the origin of all souls is the Exalted One. He is the beginning and the end of all our objectives.

The way to the vision of the Truth of which the last stage is 'merger with the Truth' cannot be fully appreciated without the knowledge of the hidden meanings of the Torah. As the Torah has been said to represent the female form of God, it is essential that for 'merger with the Truth' it must be understood at different levels. To make it a book of practice, the Jewish mystics had proposed that the Torah must be understood at four levels. First, it should be studied at the level of text (*peshat*). Secondly, to implement it in practical life and, more than mere study of it, to accept it as a way of life (*remez*); the third stage, designated as *derash* involves deeper emotional involvement and frenzy instead of simple enthusiasm or zest; in this stage the devotee considers the quest for God to be the ultimate aim and objective of his life; the fourth stage that involves knowledge of the topmost secrets of the Torah that severs the devotee's attachments with all kinds of worldly ties, and places the God Almighty in the focal centre of all his worship and meditation. Those who kept on regarding the secret meanings of the Torah as the basis for spiritual

experiences do not look upon the Torah merely as a Book of Guidance but a kind of instruction manual as well which, after putting the devotee through a course of tough exercises, can allow entry to the Ultimate Truth. It is regrettable that for the Jewish mystics, practising the Torah has been reduced to a kind of mechanical exercise that could not maintain its relationship with practical life. Rather than treating the Torah as Book of Guidance the mystics began to treat it as a book of white magic, and this led them to devise countless methods of meditation based on letters and thoughts, and different schools of *zikhron* were born. A famous book of this kind is, *The Book of Directions to the Duties of the Heart* by Bachya ben Joseph Ibn Pakuda which is said to be a text belonging to the eleventh century. In it the author has suggested ten stages of the spiritual journey, and has determined a door for entry to each stage. In the sixteenth century, under the mentorship of Issac Loria, different ways of the *zikhron* or ‘merger with the Truth’ were devised. The invention of newer methods of worship which is a common feature found among the mystics of all religions derive sustenance from this fundamental belief that through these secret exercises the devotee could not only establish rapport with God but also succeed in reaching a stage where his being merged with the Supreme Being.

<sup>24</sup> Sheikhs Abul Abbas Ahmad bin Ali Al-Buni, *Shams Al-Ma'rif Al-Kubra* (Urdu translation, Iqbaluddin Ahmad), Delhi: Farid Book Depot, p.46; for all subsequent references to this text, only ‘Al-Buni’ has been written.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 42

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 78

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 81

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 81 – see, the mystic chart for ‘meem’



<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 91

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 66

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 76

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 133 – see, concordance talisman (*wifq*) for letter ‘hey’

6	ع	۱۱۱۱	۱۱	م	۱۱۱	۶
۱۱۱۱	۶	۱۱۱	۱۱	۶	۱۱۱	۶
م	۱۱۱	۶	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱
۶	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱
۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱
۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱	۱۱۱

- <sup>33</sup> For details of the abrogated Surah Fatiha, see, Al-Buni, pp.144-149
- <sup>34</sup> See, *Daerah Al-Ma'rif* (Urdu), Lahore, under the Chapter 'Jafar', p.312
- <sup>35</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, 'The Primordial Dot: Some Thoughts about Sufi Letter in Mysticism,' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Jerusalem, 1987, p.356
- <sup>36</sup> For additional details, see, footnote no.25 of this Chapter; also see the famous book, *Zohar* (Lights) by Moses de Leon whose underpinnings can be found in the writings of the revered Jewish mystic of the second century, Rabbi Shimon.
- <sup>37</sup> To read the terminal 'meem' of 'Bismillahir Rahman al-Rahim' with the 'alif' of 'Alhamdu lillah) has been a familiar practice with many mystics and it was considered to be efficacious. Among the mystics of the later period, Shah Waliullah and Ashraf Ali Thanavi exhorted people to undertake this particular method of recitation. Mir Waliuddin has declared this method to be efficacious on the authority of *Fatawa Al-Sufiya*. See, Waliuddin, *Diseases and their Spiritual Healing*, Delhi: Nadwatul Musannifeen, 1972, p. 146
- <sup>38</sup> According to the science of numbers, the number of Surah Maryam is 299644, and its chart will be something like the following:

۹	۶	۵	۴	۹	۹	۶	۹	۴	۴	۹	۶	۵	۵	۱
۹	۶	۵	۵	۳	۹	۶	۵	۴	۸	۹	۶	۵	۴	۹
۹	۶	۵	۴	۵	۹	۶	۵	۵	۲	۹	۶	۵	۴	۷

- 'Introduction', *Tarjumah Al-Qur'an* by Ashraf Ali Thanavi, Misl Taj Company Lahore edition, p. 28
- <sup>39</sup> Al-Buni, p. 125
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 40 – see the following concordance (*wifq*):

۴	۱۳	۱۵	۱	ا	ب	د	د
۹	۷	۶	۱۲	ب	د	د	د
۵	۱۱	۱۰	۸	ج	ط	ط	ط
۱۶	۴	۳	۲	ج	ب	ب	ب

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.87

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.69

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.82

<sup>44</sup> The author of *Shams Al-Ma'rif* has written it with reference to Muhasibi that Gabriel had come to the Prophet with *Ism-e A'zam* in such a way as though it was written on a page from paradise with the seal of musk on it. According to Muhasibi the prayer was as follows: اللهم إني استلكت باسمك الإكرام According to a report traced to Anas, he said that when a woman expressed her wish to learn this prayer from the Prophet he turned her away saying 'We do not teach this prayer to women and children.' It is said that a scholar had requested an imam to write for him a prayer that would come to his help in his hours of crisis. The following prayer that has reached us through the sayings of the Elders is thought to contain *Ism-e A'zam*:

اللهم إني استلكت باسمك انك أنت الله المقدس في حقائق محض التخصيص وبأنك أنت الله على كل حال من أحوال الجد والتعديل وبأنك أنت الله المقدس بخصائص الأودية والصمدية والند والنقيض والنظير وبأنك أنت الله الذي ليس كمثلته شيء وهو السميع البصير ان تصلى على سيدنا مجد وان تقضي حوائجي كلها قضاء يكون فيه خير الدنيا والآخرة محفوظا بالرعاية من الأفات ملحوظا بخصائص العنايات يا عواد بالخيريات يا من هو أهل التقوى وأهل المغفرة وأهل الحسنات. اللهم إنها مسألة خادم تعز ربوبيتك بإظهار مسألة إنك علام الغيوب وشاهد حقائق المطالب قبل مباشرتها للقلوب فتمتها لجميل الخاتم يا خير المطلوب وصلى الله على سيدنا مجد حبيب القلوب (Al-Buni, *Shams Al-Ma'rif*, vol.1, p.83).

Those who intend to cross all the stages of spiritual attainment in a single leap would certainly find scope for the attainment of their desires in these fabricated prayers rather than in the Qur'an.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Buni, p.83

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.143

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.102

<sup>48</sup> For details, see, Mir Waliuddin, op. cit, p.203

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Taimiyah, *Al-Nabawwaat*, quoted in Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Maqalat Ehsani*, Karachi, 1959, p.317

<sup>50</sup> *Tafseer Bayaan Al-Qur'an*

<sup>51</sup> *Maqalat Ehsani*, op. cit, p.382

<sup>52</sup> For example, one can look at the Introduction to *Tarjumah Al-Qur'an* by Ashraf Ali Thanavi where one can find all kinds of Qur'anic speculations and their numerical charts. In all books of charts and instruction manuals, it is considered enough to validate them by saying that they were attributed to some Elder or someone has received them in dream. Our ulema and researchers have also made no consistent efforts to examine any Qur'anic basis of the science of numbers. They, without any qualms, copied this knowledge from their predecessors and passed it on to their successors. If the predecessors were frauds and were known to be so in their own times (for example, Al-Buni and Ibn Arabi), then the successors slowly impelled them to reliability and acceptability. As a consequence, the occult practices of the mystics attained the status of 'undesirable but unobjectionable activities'. They even carved out a niche for themselves in religious thinking.

- <sup>53</sup> Ibn Taimiyah, cf. *Maqalat Ehsani*, p.381, op. cit.
- <sup>54</sup> 'Kitab Fazail Al-Qur'an', *Sahih Bukhari*
- <sup>55</sup> Amir Khurd, *Sair Al-Auliya* (Urdu), translated by A'jaz Al-Haq Quddusi, Lahore, 1980, p.577
- <sup>56</sup> cf. Mir Waliuddin, *Mujarrabat-e Daerbi*, op. cit, p.157
- <sup>57</sup> Mir Waliuddin, op. cit, pp.137-138
- <sup>58</sup> Similarly in, *Tafsir Al-A'rais* and *Tafsir Al-Kawashi*
- <sup>59</sup> Mir Waliuddin, op. cit, p.145
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. p.183
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.146
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.147
- <sup>63</sup> Allama Ahmad Al-Daerwi, quoted in Mir Waliuddin, p.147
- <sup>64</sup> Al-Buni, vol.I, p.110
- <sup>65</sup> Mir Waliuddin, op. cit, pp.149-150
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.152
- <sup>67</sup> *Dalil Al-A'rifeen* (assembly 7), in *Hasht Behisht*, translated by Uzr Sabri, Lahore, 1996, p.98
- <sup>68</sup> *Risalah Ataul Mannan*; quoted in Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*, Lahore, p.175
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.175
- <sup>70</sup> Syed Abdul Quddus Hashmi, *Maqalaat wa Malfoozaat Iqbal Ahmad Siddiqui* (ed.), Karachi, 1991, p.245
- <sup>71</sup> For the chart of 'ha', see reference 34. In this chart, some letters are the representations of the occult interpretations of 'ha', through which benedictions were sought: اللهم إني أسئلك بالهاء من اسمك الأعظم وبالثلث العصي والأنف المقوم وبالميم الكلميس الأبر وبالمسلم والأربعة التي هي كالكف بلا معصم و بالهاء المشقوقة والواو العظيم وبالثلث العصى والأنف المقوم وبالميم الكلميس الأبر وبالمسلم والأربعة التي هي كالكف بلا معصم و بالهاء المشقوقة والواو العظيم صورة اسمك الشريف الأعظم أن تصلى على سيدنا مجد بعدد كل حرف به المقلم تقضي حاجتي وهي كذا وكذا (Al-Buni, p.133)
- <sup>72</sup> *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*, op. cit, p.181
- <sup>73</sup> See, Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *A'mal Qur'ani (Aksi)*, Delhi: Farid Book Depot, pp. 42, 43 & 46
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.17
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.53
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.169
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.61
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.6
- <sup>79</sup> رواه الترمذي وقال هذا حديث حسن صحيح غريب الإسناد, quoted in, Muhammad Zakariya Kandehlawi, *Fazail Al-A'maal*, vol.I, 'Kitab Fazail Al-Qur'an', Delhi, 1977, p.505
- <sup>80</sup> One report pertaining to this theme has been traced to Ali that to read Surah *Fateha* four times was equal to giving away four thousand dinars in charity, and to read 'Qul huwallah' three times was equal to the reading of the complete Qur'an from cover to cover. See, *Pakistani Panj Surah*, Delhi: Farid Book Depot, p.20
- <sup>81</sup> *Fazail A'mal*, op. cit, vol.1, p.538

- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.538
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid. p.541
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.540
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.509
- <sup>87</sup> *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*, op. cit, p.162
- <sup>88</sup> See, the collection of Wills by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilvi, *Wasaya Sharif* (Lahore: Noori Kutub Khana), in which it has been recorded that the maulana, a couple of hours before his death, had asked for home-made ice-cream, chicken biryani, shami kebab, parathas, milk cream, rice-pudding, lentil with ginger and other spices, kachauris stuffed with meat, apple juice, grape juice, soda bottles etc. to be sent at the time of his *fateha*.
- <sup>89</sup> *Pakistani Panj Surah* (Aksi), p.135
- <sup>90</sup> *Dalil Al-A'rifeen*, Chronicles of Moinuddin Ajmeri, ed., Khwaja Qutb Alam Bakhtiyar Kaki, in *Hasht Behisht (Majmua Malfoozat Khwajagan Chasht Ahl-e Behisht)*, translated by Uzr Sabri, Lahore, 1996, p.76
- <sup>91</sup> *Rahat Al-Muhibbeen*, Annals of Nizamuddin Auliya, ed., Amir Khusrau, in *Hasht Bahisht*, quoted in op. cit, p.651
- <sup>92</sup> *Kitab Al-Lam'*, p.66
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.68
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.69
- <sup>95</sup> *Ham'at* (Urdu Translation), op. cit, p.115
- <sup>96</sup> *Ahya Al-Uloom*, op. cit, vol.4, p.112
- <sup>97</sup> *Risalah Qishriya*, op.cit, p.47
- <sup>98</sup> *Kitab Al-Lam'*, p.515
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.516
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid. p.517
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid. p.531
- <sup>102</sup> *Fusoos Al-Hekam* (Translated by Abdul Qadir Siddiqi) op. cit, p.415
- <sup>103</sup> *Al-Qaol Al-Mansoor*, p.94
- <sup>104</sup> Quoted in Sha'rani, *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*, p.103
- <sup>105</sup> *Kalam Al-Marghoob*, tr. *Kashf Al-Mahjoob*, p.443
- <sup>106</sup> The philosophy of the Unity of Being has left its profound impact on the poetry of the East. This kind of poetry has been treated as devotional poetry: the task that could not be accomplished on the philosophical level by source books of mysticism was made possible by this popular poetry. Be it the famous popular and religious programme of popular poetry, or the evening soirees of the mystics, be it the discourses of preachers with a flair for story telling or the discourses of preachers inducing fear in the mind, their impact, to a great extent, depended on popular poetry and devotional songs prepared by different mystics in their own times, and are now regarded as

an inalienable part of our religious thinking. For example, Rumi, Hafiz, Sanai, despite all their misguided thinking, are regarded as custodians of our spiritual life and their poetry is treated with esteem and reverence by the cognoscenti. Further, some people regard *Diwan-e Hafiz* to be a sacred text through which one can even know about the future events. One great harm caused by *Mashriqiyat*, or more specifically poetry from the East, being treated as a religious literature was that the misguided thinking of the poets crept into the traditional Muslim thinking. Take the instance of Rumi who is commonly designated as 'Maulana-e Rum' and whose *Masnavi* is regarded as a treasure house of spiritual knowledge. The impact of Rumi was so far-reaching that a mature intellectual poet like Iqbal places him in the position of 'Pir Rumi'. However, the *Masnavi*, despite its poetic merit, can be considered as the burial ground of Islamic thinking where Islamic thoughts have been subverted in a very subtle way. Take, for example, the issue of Unity of Being. In the propagation of this heretic notion, he is much more effective than his predecessors like Hallaj, Bustami and Ibn Arabi.

ہر لحظہ بشکل بت عیار برآمد دل نہاں شد  
خود کوزہ و خود کوزہ گر و خود گل کوزہ، خود مند و سب و کش  
خود بر سر آں کوزہ خریدار برآمد بشکست و رداں شد  
خود آں سے و سر مست بازار برآمد، شود دل و جاں شد  
ہر دم بلباس دگر، آں یار برآمد، گہ پیر و جواں شد

This notion of the Unity of Being compelled Sanai to say as follows:

در مذہب عاشقان یک رنگ ابلتیس و محمد است یک سنگ

When the notion of any distinction between the Creator and the creation is blurred, then verses of levity of the following kind also gain respectability as religious poetry:

وہی جو مستوی عرش تھا خدا ہو کر  
اتر پڑا ہے مدینے میں مصطفیٰ ہو کر  
نگاہ عاشق کی دیکھ لیتی ہے پردہ میم کو اٹھا کر  
وہ بزم بیٹب میں آکے بیٹبیں ہزار مند کو چھپا چھپا کر

Under such circumstances, even an expert on the shariah like Ahmad Raza Khan cannot but say that it is really difficult to say anything about the actual status of Prophet Muhammad. This is what he has to say:

*No Two can be First, no Two can be Last/*

*You are the First, you are the Last, you are the Beginning, you are the End*

*We cannot call you God, and we cannot call you by any other name/*

*We leave it to God, only He knows who you are.*

ہو الاول ہو الآخر ہو الظاہر ہو الباطن  
بکل شیء علیم، لوح محفوظ خدا تم ہو  
نہ ہو سکتے ہیں دو اول، نہ ہو سکتے ہیں دو آخر  
تو اول اور آخر ابتدا تم انتہا تم ہو  
خدا کہتے نہیں بنتی، جدا کہتے نہیں بنتی  
خدا ہی پر یہ چھوڑا ہے، وہی جانے کہ کیا تم ہو

The Punjabi poets have played a greater role in propagating the philosophy of Unity of Being. Bhulle Shah says:

*Dear friend, your ways are strange! You are the manifest one and you are the hidden one. You sit quietly, hidden away from others. You are the mullah and qazi ... and you are the scholar educating others. Then tell me, if you hide yourself whom do you hide yourself from?*

واہ سوہنیاں! تیری چال عجائب لوکان نال چلیندے ہو  
 آپے ظاہر و آپے باطن، آپے لک بہندے ہو آپے ملاں، آپے قاضی، آپے علم پڑھیندے ہو  
 ہن کس تھیں آپ چھپائیدا!

*Sometimes you recite the call for prayers like a mulla; sometimes you tell about divine commandments and the sunnah. In some places you put tilak on your forehead and smoke the herb; now tell me, if you constantly change your form, then whom do you hide yourself from?*

کہتے ملاں ہو بلیندے او کہتے سنت فرض وسیندے او  
 کہتے متھے تلک لگانیدا ہن کس تھیں آپ چھپائیدا

*People have got tired reading the vedas and the Qur'an. For no reason they have worn their foreheads by prostrating in the mosque; God is neither in Mecca nor in the sacred sites; love has its own spring. When one enters it one gets lost in the effulgence of light.*

بید پراناں پڑھ پڑھ تھکے سجدے کر دیا گھس گئے متھے  
 نال رب تیر تھ نال رب کے جس پایا اس نور انوار  
 عشق دی نویں نویں بہار

A revered Sufi poet Khwaja Farid says:

*No one is Adam, no one is Satan All these are things mere fancies*

نہ کوئی آدم نہ کوئی شیطان بن گئی کل کوڑ کھانی

In other words, all the stories associated with Adam and Satan are idle thoughts. They have no relationship with reality. When He is everything and no one else exists but Him, then all notions of good and evil, merit and sin lose their meaning. In such a situation what other way remains open to the seeker except –

ہرے سجادہ رنگیں کن گرت پیر مغان گوید کہ سالک بے خبر نبود ز راہ و رسم منز لہا

(Most of the verses here have been taken from Syed Ali Abbas Jalalpuri's book, *Wahdatul Wajood te Pinjabi Shairi*, and I have quoted them from Ghulam Ahmad Parvez's book, *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*

<sup>107</sup> *Ham'aat* (Urdu Translation), op. cit, p.132

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p.133

<sup>109</sup> Ibn Arabi's books, particularly *Futoohat* and *Fusoos* are filled with alien and anti-Islamic mystical ideas. He has the status of the greatest mentor in the common Muslim minds. People held him in such high esteem and reverence that even after his misguided thoughts had been exposed, the great Muslim scholars could not muster up enough courage to debunk him. Even those who uttered words of mild criticism against him could not mount a full-fledged assault on this idol. For example, Mujaddid Alf Saani who tried to build the structure of *Wahdatul Shahood* in refutation of Ibn Arabi's *Wahdatul Wajood*, even he warns others of losing their iman if they cast doubts on his (i.e., Ibn Arabi's) piety and walihood (*munkar aur khatrast*), as stated by Ahmad Sirhindi. (Quoted in Manazir Ahsan Gilani, *Maqalat Ehsani*, p.355)

<sup>110</sup> *Anfas Al-Arifeen*, quoted in *Tasauuf ki Haqeeqat*, p.135



<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>112</sup> Shah Syed Muhammad Zauqi, *Sirre Dilbaran*, Karachi: 1405 hijra, p.40

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.349

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p.367

<sup>115</sup> Among the mystics the idea that letters contain extraordinary powers has come from the notion of the six stages of descension (*tanazzulat-e sitta*). According to this notion, the accumulated lights appeared in circular forms. The second light also took the form of a circle which the mystics interpret as forming the image of one *qutb* and two bows. It is said that one bow represents divine secrets where twenty eight divine names are engraved, and the second circle pertains to the secrets of the universe where letters related to the Empyrean realm are represented. These were the 28 letters which, with reference to the 'universal names' (*asmaa-e kauni*), the pseudo-practitioners of mysticism had declared to be the key to mysterious powers. According to them, lifting the veil of secret meanings from over these letters would make one familiar with the secrets of Godhead.

See, astronomical table and the chart of secret letters related to the universe:



See, the mystic representation of the six stages of the descent (of Prophetic Light):



- <sup>116</sup> إن الإنسان الكامل هو القطب الذي تدور عليه الأفلاك الوجود من أوله إلى آخره وهو واحد منذ كان الوجود إلى ابد الأبدين ثم له تنوع في ملابس ويظهر في كنانيس فيسمى باعتبار لباس ولا يسمى لباس آخر فاسمه الأصلي الذي هو له مجد وكنيته ابوالقاسم ووصفه عبد الله (Abdul Karim Jeeli), *Al-Insaan Al-Kamil*, published in Egypt, 1316 hijra, p.46
- <sup>117</sup> D. Pinto, *Piri-Muridi Relationship*, New Delhi: 1995, p.86- 87
- <sup>118</sup> *Tazkira Shaikh Akbar Ibn Arabi, fi Muqaddama Tarjuma Fusoos Al-Hukm*, op. cit, p.18
- <sup>119</sup> In *Futoohat* (Chapter, 24), Ibn Arabi has chronicled his meetings with seventy *qutbs* who met him in the cave of Qabees, a mysterious cave in Mecca. According to Ibn Arabi, a *qutb* has no disciples, nor does he initiate anyone into any particular way or method. However, he keeps up the work of exhortations (*nasihat*) and *wasiat*. About Abu Sau'd Shibli and Abdul Qadir Gilani, his view is that they were the *qutbs* of their times (pp. 691- 692). About *qutbs*, the great mystics think that they possess the same kind of knowledge, which is exclusive to the prophets, and that, because of being *qutbs*, they have miraculous powers. As Ibn Arabi has said about Shibli and Abdul Qadir Gilani that both of them were invested with miraculous powers by Allah. We are also told of some other figures who had no heavenly sanction to intervene in the cosmic system, nevertheless, they would sometime try their hand at it. Muhammad Awani is said to have been one of them who had to face the wrath of God for his indulgence in such acts.
- <sup>120</sup> *Tazkira Shaikh Akbar Ibn Arabi, fi Muqaddama Tarjuma Fusoos Al-Hekam*, op. cit, p.19
- <sup>121</sup> Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan has written in الأمن والعلي that the sun does not set till it has saluted Ghaus A'zam. He has written, with reference to Abdul Qadir Gilani, that 'when the new year comes it salutes me and tells me about all that is going to happen; similarly, every new day and every new month salute me and tell me about the coming events.'
- <sup>122</sup> The six stages of the descent (of Prophetic Light) which the mystics also describe in terms of definition, effulgence and delimitation constitute a mystic and imaginary chronicle about the origin of the universe whose basis can be found not in the Qur'an or other heavenly texts but in the 'inspirational' books of the mystics whose views run counter to those of the Qur'an. The mystics of later ages have worked assiduously on the notion engendered by Ibn Arabi. However, the fact is that they have not been able to present any clear and consensual image of the *Tanazzulat*. As we have pointed out, the notion that the six stages of the descent of the Prophetic Light that are said to represent the efforts at the cognition of God in different stages, basically, gets its sustenance from the idea that the universe is a reflection of His being or His shadow, and that God is present everywhere in different forms and shapes.
- According to the mystics, God needed to take help of these six stages of the descent of the Prophetic Light because He wanted that human beings should know Him: 'كنت كنزاً مخفياً'. After taking recourse to the *Tanazzulat* God's status as 'الآن كما كان' remained intact even though His being undertook a new shape, or to use the term used by the believers in the unity of manifestation, His shadow took a new form which is corroborated by the following verse — أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظَّلَّ (Al-Furqan:95)

As all these fabricated concepts associated with the creation of the universe prevalent among the Sufis are dependent on their own 'inspirations' and secret knowledge, they cannot be examined on the crucible of any parameters of rationality, science or Divine Revelation. A flash of this interesting, complicated and incomprehensible notion can be seen in the chart (see, under footnote 170) that I have copied from the famous mystic book, *Sirre Dilbaran*.

<sup>123</sup> Well, the entire community of the mystics can be designated as 'People of the Unseen' (*rijal al-ghaib*). However, in the specific idiom of mysticism, the term *rijal al-ghaib* is used to designate the group of mysterious figures about whom it is said that for the six days in a week they travel from one direction to another. North to south, east to west. This journey of theirs can be a cause of blessings as also of curse. It is said that when they travel in the reverse direction then calamities take place. However, if you happen to travel in the same direction as they are travelling, then your task is certainly facilitated. The journey will yield good rewards. But for this, it is necessary that you must be aware of the timings of these unseen figures. This information can be provided only by the mystics. It is also said that on Wednesday all these unseen figures take rest at some spot on their way. That is why Wednesday is taken to be inauspicious for travel.

<sup>124</sup> The scheme of invisible administration devised by the mystics where there is a series of administrators – from Qutb to Najeeb, Naqeeb and Wali – who are said to conduct the affairs of the world is absolutely un-Qur'anic and alien to Islamic thoughts. According to this way of thinking, Allah has chosen to share his task of Godhead with those who are close to him. To speak the truth, under this mystical scheme of things the God Himself is seen to be functionless, as the affairs of the universe can be seen to be conducted by *qutbs* and their underlings. It is said that the *qutb* conducts the affairs of the universe along with his subordinate staff in whom the personality of the *ghaus* is also included. Sometimes, the images of the *qutb* and the *ghaus* merge into one another. According to Ibn Arabi (*Futoohat*: 383), the *qutb* looks after the whole universe, whereas two imams look after the realm of the Unseen (عالم غيب), and the realm of the Visible (عالم شهادت). There are seven *abdals* who look after the seven realms (*saat aqleem*) of the world. Ibn Arabi has described his meetings with these seven *abdals*. Apart from these there are those spiritual figures who are not *qutbs* but possess similar potentials. There are four *autaads* who are appointed in the four directions, and forty *naqeebs* are supposed to be engaged in looking after the needs of the people. The number of *naqeebs* runs into two hundred. Whatever happens in the world is in the hands of these mystics who are appointed by Allah. Even natural calamities and disasters take place through them. They live with the common people and so it is difficult to identify them. It is said that these spiritual figure have their annual meeting during the Haj pilgrimage in the valley of Mina in which prophets also participate. In this meeting, they chalk out the programme for the coming year. Some mystics believe that 'Al-Fard' is God's chief adviser, whereas other mystics believe that the *qutb* is at the centre of universe in sufi thinking.

This concept of the community of the mystics has played a crucial role in investing Sufi literature with a kind of occult meaning. However, as the administration of the universe was

taken up by the elders, the common people now did not feel any urge to come forward and face the challenges of the future.

<sup>125</sup> *Kitab Al-Lama'*, p.576

<sup>126</sup> It is said about Nizamuddin Auliya that he made his disciples prostrate before him. It is recorded in *Sair Al-Auliya* that once when, in the presence of the son of a religious figure who had come to visit him, a disciple of his named Wahiduddin Quraishi prostrated before him, the visitor was stunned. He could not reconcile himself with this sight, but Nizamuddin Auliya dismissed the issue by saying that to do so was *mubah*, i.e., undesirable but not reprehensible. He gave the argument that just as the obligatory duties of the earlier ummah had been abrogated, but they are still dear to some people, for example the fasting of ashura. Among the earlier communities, people used to prostrate before their elders – disciples to their teachers, ummah to the prophet and the subjects to the king. Under the new shariah, prostrating before someone is *mubah* for the people. He also offered the argument that since his mentor, Fariduddin Ganj Shagr did not object to his disciples prostrating before him, he (Nizamuddin Auliya) could not forbid his disciples to do so. If he did so, it would amount to proving his mentor to be an ignoramus. (For further details, see, *Sair Al-Auliya*)

<sup>127</sup> *Ham'at* (Urdu Translation), op. cit, p.242

<sup>128</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Al-Tafheemat Al-Ilahiyah*, Bijnor: 1936, vol.I, p.85

<sup>129</sup> *Maqalat Ehsani*, op. cit, p.494

<sup>130</sup> *Ham'at* (Urdu Translation), op. cit, p.229

<sup>131</sup> The accounts written by Shah Waliullah in *Ham'at* of his journey to the realm of souls (*Aalam-e Arwah*), just like the celestial journey of prophets, go far beyond the scope of walihood. His claim is that he saw members of the Prophet's family in that realm who, according to his accounts, had been placed in august positions in *Hazirat Al-Quds*. He observed the states of many predecessors, mystics and pious souls and gained knowledge about their status and position in the celestial realm. According to him some mystics were endowed with secret powers regarding *ihsan*, while others were endowed with secret powers of love or celibacy. Similarly, some other mystics were endowed with secret powers regarding memory, peace or those associated with Owaisi. As for Ghaus-e Azam, Shah Waliullah's view about him is that he is blessed with *Nisbat-e Awaisi*. The person holding this position plays a key role in the hierarchy of the celestial realm. He is endowed with an effulgence which is an amalgam of the four miraculous powers, such as, *abda*, *khalq*, *tadbir* and *tajalli*. As these four miraculous powers are active in the scheme of the celestial realm, the person occupying this position becomes the fountainhead of innumerable miracles. Waliullah asserts that the sublime words that emanate from the tongue of Ghaus Al-Azam owe their credit to this particular position.

As Ghaus Al-Azam is considered by the mystics to be even superior to prophets, it is entirely credible to assume that he has miraculous powers over the elements of the universe. However, one is surprised by the claim made by Waliullah to the effect that he presented himself as the

embodiment of an amalgam of all these affinities (*nisbat*). He says, 'When I completed my spiritual journey, a broad path opened for me on behalf of all the great mentors.' Thus, in his words, the status he was placed in was an amalgam of all the seven affinities (*Ham'at*: p. 197). This account by Waliullah about the celestial realm verges on blasphemy. Be it the claims regarding his spiritual status, or his efforts to convince people about Ghaus Al-Azam's miraculous powers over the elements of the universe, the fact is that they cannot be considered credible even on the basis of reason and knowledge. Being far removed chronologically from the age of Abdul Qadir Gilani we are not in a position to offer any arguments regarding the claims made on his behalf. However, if one undertakes a close study of his writings, especially *Ghuniat Al-Talibeen* and *Futooh Al-Ghaib*, one has the impression that, let alone calling him the *qutb* of the time or Ghaus Al-Azam, even to call him a sober scholar would be an exaggeration. A person who claims to have control over the universe and who boasts about each and every psychic utterances of his as the voice from the heaven, why, his books do not meet even a sober academic standard. Like most Sufi books, many of Waliullah's celebrated books are littered with incredible events, unreliable reports, folk tales and legends.

Concerning the detailed accounts that one finds in *Ghuniat Al-Talibeen* of heaven and hell, or the story of Bliqees steeped in sensuality, or the people wallowing in the luxuries of paradise and the sensual accounts of the houris, neither the Qur'an nor the canonical books of traditions do not provide any basis for them. These fanciful accounts and stories have reached the Islamic world through the religious assemblies of the Jewish religious scholars, or in the later ages, our own storytellers have improvised these accounts in their footnotes, taking the cue from their Jewish counterparts. Those who, even on the planes of research could not display a high standard of scholarship and scrutiny, and the study of whose books give one the impression of a different Islam, how can one be convinced that Allah has placed them in the position of the governance of the universe? For those who feel that for the maturity of their belief and the maintenance of their Faith it is essential to believe in Shah Waliullah's journey to the celestial realm, for them there is certainly no other option except to consider such pure fiction as an integral part of the Faith. However, those who believe in the Prophet, the messenger of God, and those who regard the Qur'an as the final and definitive text of the Divine Revelation, should know very clearly that the Qur'anic way of life has no scope for such fanciful positions (in which the mystics are have placed themselves).

<sup>132</sup> The arguments that Shah Waliullah offered to make different Sufic orders a part of Islam change the complexion of Islam and its history. They place *auliya* and the mystics in a higher position than that of the Prophet's Companions. Shah Waliullah claims that the present day mysticism has reached us after passing through four evolutionary stages. In its first stage, i.e., at the time of the Prophet, it was in the first stage where there was nothing except a course of *ihsaan*, discharging of the obligatory duties and litanies or *zikr*. In that age there were no personalities in the forefront and, in his view, the mysteries and miracles, frenzy and ecstasy were not so intense among them.

This is Waliullah's view about mysticism at the time of the Prophet. The second stage, under this scheme, begins with Junaid Baghdadi. In this stage mysticism took great strides. According to Waliullah, some special individuals undertook extraordinary spiritual exercises, renounced the world, and surrendered themselves totally to the mystic way of life. They listened to devotional songs, would lose themselves in frenzy and ecstasy, would tear off their own clothes, would dance, and were able to know what was going on in other people's minds through their occult powers. Waliullah says that in those days the mystics 'did not worship God because of the fear of hell or the bounties of heaven, but the main pivot of their worship was the love they bore in their minds for God.' (*Ham'at*: p.73). During this period, *twajjuh* or rigorous concentration on the vision of God was not the exclusive concern of the mystics, nevertheless, they were not completely bereft of divine radiance. They experienced the Truth like a lightning flash; it was there for a moment and then vanished. However, at this stage, no distinction was made between the Unity of Being and Unity of Manifestation, nor had the debate yet taken place as to what was the relationship between the Universe and God's Being: how human beings merged in the Being of God and what were the realities of being and nothingness. However, in the fourth stage of mysticism, the emergence of Ibn Arabi further broadened people's mind. In this stage, different phases of the emergence of being and lights were identified, and in the words of Waliullah, 'because of these spiritual figures, reaching the First Being, i.e., God became easier, and their blessings and benedictions illuminated the terrestrial and the nether worlds (*Ham'at*: p. 76). In other words, what Waliullah wants to say in his otherwise flawed mystical idiom is that the journey of *ihsan* that had begun in the period of the Prophet reached its logical conclusion with the emergence of Ibn Arabi. The miracles and the states of frenzy and ecstasy that had not consolidated themselves among the mystics in the first stage to the extent that it would dominate over everything else, became so efficacious in the final stage that they made it easy to reach God Himself.

Such views that Waliullah claims to have been of divine origin are so highly blasphemous they can only be accepted at the cost of Islamic belief. And unless we show no knowledge of and respect for the agency of Prophethood, Waliullah's inspired words will have no value for us. Later, in the same book Waliullah has also revealed that these four stages of mysticism are acceptable to God and he recognises the said spiritual hierarchy. (*Ham'at*: p. 73). We have to feel pity for the Muslims of the first century of Islam that despite the presence of the last Prophet among them they could not reach the heights of spirituality that were scaled by the followers of Ibn Arabi and the mystics of the later ages, which brought so many blessings and benedictions that the terrestrial world and the nether world were illuminated. (*Ham'at*: p.76).

<sup>133</sup> For details, see, Abu Hamid Ghazali, *Kimia-e Sa'dat* (Urdu Translation), Saidur Rahman Alvi, Lahore, p.303

<sup>134</sup> *Awarif Al-Ma'rif*, op. cit, vol.2, p.53

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Abdullah Farahi, *Tasauuf, Ek Tajziyati Mutal'a*, Aligarh:1987, p.103

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p.104

- <sup>137</sup> *Futoohat Makkiyah*, vol.I, p.10
- <sup>138</sup> Ibid. p.98
- <sup>139</sup> Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tarikh Mashaikh Chisht*, op. cit, vol. I, p.143
- <sup>140</sup> Ibid. p.265
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid. p.265
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid. p.275
- <sup>143</sup> Ibid. p.281
- <sup>144</sup> A mature thinker and critic like Shibli Nomani also could not help being fascinated by the magical poetry of *Masnavi*. In his words, 'Of all the books of poetry or prose written in Farsi, one cannot find the kind of merits and treatment of themes as one comes across in *Masnavi* in abundant measure. What to speak of Farsi, such literary merits and virtuosity cannot be found even in Arabic literature.' Shibli opines that if the scholars and the cognoscenti paid more attention to *Masnavi* than any other book and appreciated it in exaggerated terms, to the extent of saying, *hast Qur'an dar zuban-e pahlavi* – then there is nothing surprising about it. (Quoted in Nizami, vol. I, pp.155-156)
- <sup>145</sup> *Maqalat Ehsani*, op. cit, p.398
- <sup>146</sup> See the booklet by Ashraf Ali Thanavi, *Fi Mubadi Al-tasawwuf fi Buniyaan Al-Masheed*, Shaikh Ahmad Kabir Rifai, translated by Maulana Zafar Ahmad, Karachi, p.138
- <sup>147</sup> Al-Buni, pp.629- 30
- <sup>148</sup> Amir Khurd, *Sair Al-Auliya*, (Urdu translation), op. cit, p.583
- <sup>149</sup> Ibid. p.587
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid. p.5898
- <sup>151</sup> Ibid. p.588
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid. p.589
- <sup>153</sup> Ibid. p.590
- <sup>154</sup> Ibid. p.590
- <sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.596
- <sup>156</sup> It is written in *Sairul Auliya* that Muhammad Chishti had also performed Salah-e Ma'kus. About Fariduddin Ganj Shakar it is said that he had drawn a circle around a well adjacent to a mosque, banning the entry of anyone. A branch of the tree overshadowed the well, and he used to perform the salah hanging by the branch. See, Abdul haq Muhaddith Dehlavi, *Akhbar Al-Akhbar*, Deoband: Kutubkhana Rahimiya, p.59
- <sup>157</sup> *Sairul Auliya*, p.729

سیر الاولیاء میں لکھا ہے کہ محمد چشتی نے نماز معکوس پڑھی تھی۔ فرید الدین شکر کے بارے میں کہا جاتا ہے کہ انھوں نے ایک مسجد سے متصل کنویں میں چلہ معکوس کھینچا تھا۔ وہ اس طرح کہ درخت کی ایک شاخ جو کنویں کے اوپر سایہ فگن تھی اس سے کنویں میں اُلٹے لٹک کر آپ صلوٰۃ معکوس پڑھا کرتے تھے۔

(ملاحظہ ہو عبدالحق محدث دہلوی، اخبار الابرار، کتب خانہ رحیمیہ دیوبند، ص ۹۵)

- <sup>158</sup> The prayer is as follows: استغفر الله ذو الجلال والإكرام من جميع الذنوب والآثام (Quoted in Amir Khurd, *Sairul Auliya*, p.596)
- <sup>159</sup> Ibid. p.596- 97
- <sup>160</sup> *Niyat Namah*, published in Bihar Sharif, p.18
- <sup>161</sup> Ibid. p.17-18
- <sup>162</sup> For generating refined states of feeling in the vocal chords some devotees were exhorted to undertake devotional singing. According to Waliullah, 'It is desirable that colourful poetry should be chosen for singing, in the rhythm of high pitch and low pitch. For such a person the music emanating from tambourine and *rubab* was also said to be beneficial. The argument given was – music induces the same kind of joy and ecstasy as wine does. Thus if the states of pure love and poetry and music are employed, then even the most sober devotees also feel a kind of change in themselves, and their solemnity melts away. Waliullah also prescribes recitation of the Qur'an and reflecting on it for those who are in quest for the Truth but he did not dismiss totally the conventions prevalent among the mystics. (*Ham'at*, op. cit, p.188)
- <sup>163</sup> The mystics laid extraordinary emphasis on love. But this love is not one that is purely immune to worldly urges. Rather, some mystics prescribe worldly love as a means of attaining divine love. In Waliullah's view, those who are too dull or too sober in temperament and not sensitive enough to receive angelic or divine influences, should try to fall in love with someone to engender such states of mind within themselves. Some also stipulate that this love should be pure, that there should be no elements of sensuality because when a person sees his loved one it (sensuality) would vitiate his mind. He looks for union and becomes sad at the thought of separation. The beloved's pleasure makes his heart blossom forth while her indifference makes him downcast. (*Ham'at*, p. 187)
- <sup>164</sup> R A Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Delhi, 1976, pp.60-61
- <sup>165</sup> *Awarif*, vol.1, p.109
- <sup>166</sup> Abdur Rahman Jami, *Nafhat Al-Uns*, Kanpur, 1893, pp.181-182
- <sup>167</sup> *Sairul Auliya*, op. cit, p.127
- <sup>168</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>169</sup> Ibid. p.92
- <sup>170</sup> Ibid. p.93
- <sup>171</sup> Ibid. p.95
- <sup>172</sup> Ibid. p.96
- <sup>173</sup> *Ham'at*, op. cit, p.131
- <sup>174</sup> For details, see, Shah Waliullah, *Al-Qaol Al-Jameel*, op. cit, pp.44-45
- <sup>175</sup> *Mabadi Tasauuf fi Bayan Al-Musheed*, op. cit, p.313
- <sup>176</sup> For details, see, *Al-Qaol Al-Jameel* and the experiences of the vision of the Truth by Shah Waliullah as described in *Ham'at*, and its methods.
- <sup>177</sup> *Kashf Al-Mahjoob*, p.223



<sup>178</sup> See, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Kimiya-e Sa'dat*; Urdu translation, Muhammad Saeedur Rahman Alvi, Lahore, p.31

<sup>179</sup> See, *Maktoobat-eTasauuf*, Saharanpur, vol.I, p.77

<sup>180</sup> One reason why Ghazali was regarded as a pillar of Islam is that he undertook an attitude of reconciliation and compromise in his thoughts in an age when Muslim thinking was undergoing through a phase of severe crisis and confusion, when Muslim scholars and jurists were engaged in the competitive manoeuvre of declaring one another an infidel and when each group among the jurists, traditionists and the sufis considered only itself to be following the right path and all else to be misguided. In this atmosphere of competing and contradictory views, Ghazali undertook the task of presenting a universally acceptable view of Islam in his hands. His book, *فيصل التفرقة بين الإسلام والزندقة* represents his efforts at the synthesis of the competing versions of Islam. In his effort to present an inclusive and generally acceptable Islam, Ghazali tried to make an evaluation of even those reports on the basis of which one group used to declare members of a rival group to be infidels. For example, about the Hadith pertaining to 73 factions, he said that except for the Najji (ultimately successful) faction, all the other factions consigned to hell would not be permanently condemned, but would stay temporarily depending on the gravity of their sins. (غزالي، *فيصل التفرقة بين الإسلام والزندقة*, ed. Sulaiman Duniya, 1381 hijra, p.203). Similarly, he did not undertake a detailed explication of the Hadith, *القدرية مجوس هذه الأمة* – and contented himself merely by saying that there could be found two views in the ummah regarding the Qadiriya sect, and its final resolution should be left to the Supreme Judge who knows all and judges all. (Ghazali, *Risala Imla'a fil-Mushkilat Al-Ahya*, 1311 hijra, published in Egypt) Ghazali also stipulated that it was wrong to declare anyone a believer or an infidel on the basis of the analysis of *nass*. He also said that the denial of the continuity (of a chain through which a Hadith has been transmitted) by anyone does not constitute enough ground to declare him an infidel, and advanced the argument that it is rather difficult to prove the continuity of any other document except the Qur'an. He adopted the same attitude regarding consensus. Ghazali tried to incorporate all the competitive groups into an overarching whole by asserting that all these people are believers in Islam. In an atmosphere where the rival groups were baying for each other's blood, people were desperately looking for a voice of assimilation and compromise and it is said that Ghazali's efforts have been successful in reducing the intensity of factionalism. The conflict between the Hanbalites and the Asharites lost some of its deadly edge, and in 502 hijra, the Shias and Sunnis reached a compromise on the principle of mutual coexistence. Ghazali's catholicity as displayed regarding the non-Muslim communities also played a role in establishing him as a moderate and generally acceptable interpreter of Islam. Unlike the jurists, he did not pass judgment as to who should go to heaven and who to hell, and left it to the final Day of Judgement, and asserted that not to speak of Muslims, 'rather I would argue that even the Christians of Rome and the Turks who are our contemporaries would also be incorporated

among those who would receive Allah's blessings'. ( بل أقول إن أكثر نصارى الروم والترك في هذا الزمان تشملهم ) (رحمة الله إن شاء الله)

(*Faisal Al-Tafreqa Baina Islam wal-zindaqa*, op. cit, p.204)

Ghazali is the first person who incorporated mysticism into the mainstream Muslim thinking and provided it with a certain ideological basis. Before him there were indeed groups of mystics with their hospices and their writings, but they were not considered to present particular strands of Muslim thinking. However, when Ghazali tried to build a holistic structure of Islam by synthesizing the two kinds of jurisprudence – manifest and hidden – then like many other groups, the mystics also began to be considered as a part of the conceptual world of Muslims.

The Sufi groups were greatly excited at being incorporated into the mainstream Muslim thinking. Not only that many leaders of mystic groups devised many paths and spiritual orders, but also it happened that because of attaining acceptability by the general populace these spiritual mentors soon came to acquire key positions among common Muslims. Syed Ahmad Kabir Al-Rifai, the founder of the Rifai order and who is counted among the contemporaries of Ghazali, attained such acceptability among the common people that during the days that have a special significance among the mystics, for example, the night of 15<sup>th</sup> of the month of Shaban, massive crowds of thousands of people would gather at his hospice. (*Shuzooz*, vol. 4, p. 260). About Syed Rifai, Ibn Khalkan has written that specific days were fixed for holding a general fair at his hospice where crowds of mystics would gather there and arrangements were made for their food and lodging. This fair meant for the mystics, soon turned into a spectacle ground where groups of fakirs began to display different kinds of feats in which they excelled. If someone gobbled up live snakes, another jumped into a pit of fire. A bonfire would be lit for them around which they danced till the moment the fire had not gone out. In other words, these mystic hospices became the centres of popular Islam where along with the faqirs and the destitute, loafers and fellows who were good for nothing were also provided food and lodging. And why should't it be so? Because in comparison with other versions of the Faith, this popular version was easy to follow. We have the words of the great spiritual figure, Syed Ahmad Kabir to attest this view: 'I have trodden on all the paths of mysticism, but found no path better than that of meekness, weakness and dependence'. (سلكت كل الطرق الموصلة فما رأيت أقرب ولا أسهل ولا أصلح من الافتقار والذل والانكسار)

<sup>181</sup> Sarraj Tusi, a famous Sufi scholar of the fourth century hijra, expresses surprise at the fact that when people approach only traditionists to determine the veracity of the Prophetic traditions and no jurisprudent is expected to perform this task, then what should be the reason that in the cases relating to mysticism, hidden knowledge and affairs of the heart, people would approach anyone else except the mystics. According to him, the mystics are the pioneers of the above fields of knowledge and these are the fields that concern themselves with lofty meanings. If people from other fields began to meddle with these fields it would only lead to disasters. (*Kitab Al-Lam'a*, p.54). In the 'Introduction' to his book, *Tabqat Al-Sufiya Al-Kubra*, Abdul Wahab Shirani has expressed the view that if the leading jurisprudents are entitled to draw formulations from the

Book and the sunnah and draw commandments regarding obligatory, unobligatory, desirable and admirable duties, and decide about what is permissible and what is impermissible, then why people are surprised when the imams of the mystics who owe allegiance to the Book and the sunnah undertake similar tasks? If the mujtahid has the right to issue commandments, through his innovative efforts, in non-shariah matters, then why shouldn't the same right be extended to the mystics? (*Tabqat Al-Sufiya Al-Kubra*, vol.1, p.4). When such thoughts gained wide currency, people started thinking that the books of mysticism, like the books of jurisprudence, were a part of Muslim thinking. The majority of Muslims started believing that the pearls of wisdom regarding spiritual knowledge and the Ultimate Truth that the mystics had gathered emanated from the same source from which the imams of jurisprudence drew formulations regarding juridical issues. Another reason for the mystics gaining wide respectability was that, in comparison with the jurists, they employed more forceful arguments and talked in the language of allegory or parable. The jurists had claimed that they had tried to understand the Book of Guidance in the light of reports and practices as a result of which the books of jurisprudence were written down to provide practical guidance to common people. However, the mystics too, through their revelations and inspirations, traced their lineage back directly to the prophethood which left the impression, sometimes or the other, that these spiritual figures considered themselves to be in the line of prophethood and helped its continuity. Without them, the religion would become simply a collection of soulless books. For example, it was said that the mystics' self-seclusion for 40 days was similar to Moses' stay in Mount Sinai for forty days in response to the divine call. Some went so far as to assert that their love for seclusion, renunciation of the world and meditation were such inevitable stages of spiritual evolution which even the Prophet had to pass through during the days of his secluded mediation in the cave of Hira. Thus there must have been some truth in the claim made by the mystics that their souls received some lights from the Unseen, for such a notion has always been associated with People of the Unseen, i.e., mystics. Some reliable Islamic scholars have also pointed out that the Prophet's hearing of the voice from heaven or Gabriel's intense embrace of the Prophet that was almost suffocating to death (بلغ الجهد مني حتى ظننت أنه الموت) was an experience that has its parallel in what the mystics designate as 'tawajjuh' or controlled breathing. Some scholars (such as Manazir Ahsan Gilani) even asserted that the spiritual ecstasy that the mystics experience causing them sometime to utter incredible remarks has a semblance in the Prophet's ascension to heaven and his experience of the celestial world. (Manazir Ahsan Gilani, op. cit, p.223)

<sup>182</sup> Abbas Afandi Mahmood Al-Aqqad, *Al-Shazoor*, 1915, vol.5, p.328

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. p.327

<sup>184</sup> See, Preface to *Ahya Al-Uloom*

<sup>185</sup> Different spiritual orders of mysticism trace their lineage to some ancient mystic or the other, or some historical personalities. The fact, however, is that their chains do not flow from top to bottom. On the contrary, long after these personalities are dead and gone that their successors

trace back their roots in the past to accord respectability to their particular spiritual order. For example, even though Abdul Qadir Gilani's sphere of influence had extended far and wide during his lifetime, but one does not find any organisation built around him or any spiritual order named after him during the years that he lived in the world. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami who is often led by his conviction rather than by his historical sense, also holds the view that the organisational set up of the Qadiriya order began at least fifty years after the Sheikh's death. (*Tarikh Mashaikh Chasht*, vol.I, p.162)

Before the third century hijra, mysticism had not been known as a coherent school of thought. There is no doubt about the fact that the moral decline in the Muslim society and the transformation of religious knowledge into a means of worldly gain had engendered a spirit of frustration in the community. Particularly in a situation where a significant number of people among the traditionists pursued their vocation in order to acquire social prestige and rewards. Or, there were the jurists whose ultimate aim was to be made a judge by the government of the time or to be placed in similar other important positions. In this situation a group of mystics not only undertook constructive criticism of the prevailing situation but they were so disgusted by the materialism of the ulema that they adopted renunciation of worldly comforts as a desirable stance. In any case, in the first two centuries of Islam one does not find the slightest trace of any such group in the Muslim community, nor was there any concerted effort by any group that advocated renunciation of the world as a desirable attitude towards life. At the most, one could only see the phenomenon that a certain section of the ulema or the jurists who had employed their knowledge of the Faith as a stepping stone for worldly comforts and positions of authority. There were also others who were well-versed in the Qur'an and Hadith, and at the same time endowed with the capabilities to acquire worldly success and gain, but their piety stopped them from being lost in the crowd of the seekers of wealth and gain. These were the people whose assemblies and conversations bore the imprint of their close rapport with Allah, and seeing them one would realise that the people who thought that the worldly life is a brief one had not become a rarity! There were some political factors because of which the collective efforts to remedy the situation had turned into civil wars. From the martyrdom of Othman to the martyrdom of Husain, and then sporadic rebellions against the ruling establishment by the Kharejites led to an impression that it was the time for a pacifist movement. This is the reason why the attitude of pacifism seems so dominant in the assemblies of the pious people in the earlier centuries.

Thus, pacifism as a desirable attitude dominated from the beginning of the 3rd century of Islam. And slowly, its contours, in contradistinction with the juridical thinking of the time, began to emerge. However, in the earlier centuries, up to the time of Ibn Arabi, all the activities that revolved around mysticism were, by and large, within the framework of the Qur'an. Despite all the chaos and confusion, the fact remains that Islamic pacifism, on the whole, was subservient to the Islamic way of life. For a proper evaluation of this phenomenon it is necessary that we should take a look at the mystic literature of the initial centuries of Islam.

By the fourth century hijra, the terms dealing with mysticism had emerged, and distinct groups of mystics had defined their own individual identities. However, they had the reputation of representing extreme views within Islam. They were known for introducing scholastic arguments in matters of beliefs and affairs of the heart and had a predilection for using its methodology to jolt the body and the mind. This led the common people to believe that this group of God-fearing people excelled in spirituality and they were lost in the world of thought and contemplation. However, these people did not have the same kind of importance in mainstream Islamic thinking as they began to enjoy after the conciliatory efforts of Ghazali. Till the fourth century hijra, the highest aim of the mystics used to be that the devotee should be able to progress through the different stages of spirituality to the final stage. He should recite the prayers devised by the mentors, study the Unseen and prepare himself adequately to chant litanies and pass through specified spiritual states. It was also said that out of the different states that the mystics go through, the first state was meditation (*muraqaba*). Till that time, the mystics were not aware of the six or five stages of the descension, nor did they consider themselves to be appointed by God in different position to look after specific affairs of the world.

<sup>186</sup> The Sufis want to trace their lineage to the elders of the first generation of Islam. The problem, however, is that one cannot find any clear or discernible trace of mysticism among the first generation of Muslims. It is another matter that the sayings of these individuals and the supernatural feats attributed to them have been recorded profusely in the books of mysticism. For example, Habib Ajami, Fudail bin A'yad, Ibrahim bin Adham, Shaqeeq Balakhi Zun-noon Masri, Hatim Asam, Abdul Rahim Derbi and others who have the reputation of being the mystics of the first generation. One can find a kind of indifference to the affairs of the world in them, but the renunciation of the world as a philosophical stance had not yet made its appearance. Probably, Harith Muhasibi is the first person who made renunciation of the world his chosen subject and began to write books about it. His books written in the genres of *hikmat* or parables, tales or fables combined the searching scrutiny of a philosopher, the affirmative and negative arguments adopted by the scholastics and the method of storytelling as adopted by the followers of the past prophets. Reading them the reader would feel that the writer had indeed touched a sympathetic chord in his heart. The author had said something in a way that had not yet been noticed by him, in sum, it was as though in everything that the writer said had immense possibilities, as indicated through the Qur'anic statement – *فَاعْتَبِرُوا يَا أُولِيَ الْأَبْصَارِ*.

The stories and fables associated with mysticism and the philosophy of the renunciation of the world contained enough material for mental satisfaction of those who, though consciously, hated the scholastics, but were unconsciously impressed by the force of arguments proffered by them. As Islam was on a triumphal march embracing many nations and regions, it was natural that its contours would undergo through a process of evolution. The Muslim world was beset by a climate of prosperity. In this prevailing atmosphere of opulence and prosperity, it seemed as though the fakirs and those indifferent to the material world would also be swept away. In such a situation it

was natural that the thinking minds and sensitive hearts would take interest in the chronicles of Sufis where indifference to material comforts and worldly gains was presented as a viable way of life, and it was a stance that had the virtue of jolting people out of their complacency.

Who could deny the virtue of plain living and high thinking? But when this notion changed itself into the philosophy of the renunciation of the world, it began to be seen as an alien thought in Islam. That is why Abu Zar'a, known as a great traditionist of his age, took up cudgels against such a philosophy of life. He declared Harith Muhasibi's books, despite all their merits, as spreading unlawful innovation (*bid'at*) and filth. (See, *Tarikh Baghdad* by Khateeb, vol. 8, p. 215). He asked the rhetorical question that what, after all, was the reason that those who were moved by Muhasibi's books and found therein plenty of materials for their edification reluctant to read and consult the Qur'an and find means for their edification therein? What was the reason, after all, that the deceiving words of such authors (as Muhasibi) began suddenly to fascinate us? Till yesterday, such thoughts were an anathema in religious thinking. Thus, Abu Zar'a reached the conclusion that this group of mystics had gone astray from the path of Islam – هؤلاء قوم خالفوا أهل العلم.

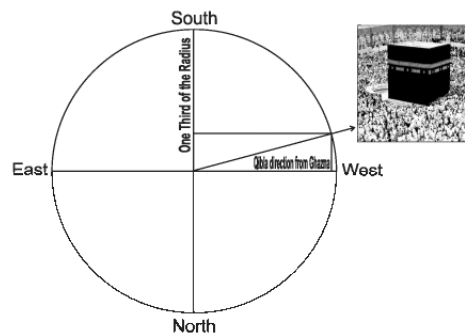
<sup>187</sup> Despite the extraordinary erudition of Ghazali, this moral or cultural concept of the Faith did not cut much ice with the people. Edicts were issued to burn his books. For instance, it is recorded in *Shuzoor Al-Zahb* (vol. V, pp, 115-124) by Ibn Imad that the government of Maghreb Aqsa, known as the rule of Al-Moravides, issued the edict that all Ghazali's writings found within its territories should be fed to the fire. It is also said about Ayyaz, the famous judge of Grenada, that he had issued edicts for burning Ghazali's books. All this points to the fact that Ghazali's concept of Islam that was accepted in later years as a genuine critique of the orthodox Islam, and which was gradually accepted by the majority of Muslims, did not make much headway in his lifetime. Even after thirty years of his death, if edicts were issued for the burning of his books, it is proof enough of the fact that his notion of Islam appeared alien to the common Muslims of the time.

## SECTION VII

<sup>1</sup> A.J. Wensinck, 'Kibla', in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 5, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1960, pp.189-93.

<sup>2</sup> Suliman Bachear, 'Qubla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches', *The Muslim World*, 81, no. 3-4 (1991), p.268.

<sup>3</sup> Figure



- <sup>4</sup> David A. King, *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* (Brookfield, 1993), p.257.
- <sup>5</sup> David A. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2004), p. 215.
- <sup>6</sup> Al-Khwarizmi (d.874) and Al-Battani (d.929) prepared tables about determining the direction of Ka'bah from various regions that were later further technically organized with minute details by Habsh al Haseeb (d. 864), Ibn al Haytham (d. 1040) and Al-Biruni (d. 1050). And later still in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century on the basis of new research and a new formula undertaken by Abu Ali Al Maraqqashi Muqit al Khalili from Damascus prepared an astonishing table determining the direction of Ka'bah from various regions. See Samsó, Julio. 'Astronomical Tables and Theory', in *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture. Vol.4: Science and Technology in Islam* (Ed. A.Y. Al-Hassan) Part 1: *The Exact Sciences*, Paris: UNESCO, pp.209-234.
- <sup>7</sup> For a detailed and eye-opening discussion on the science of making prayer time-tables, see: David A. King, *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* and David A. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization. 2 vols.* Leiden, 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> During the earlier centuries of Islam, not only was it difficult to determine the prayer timings, it was also difficult to determine the length of different parts of the day and night. The only way to determine the time was to know the changing positions of the sun during the day and the position of the stars at night. In other words, only by studying the skies more meticulously was it possible to determine time. It all depended on measuring how various planets of the universe circulated in their respective paths in relation to the earth. It could be explained in the following manner: if one star was positioned at one corner of a triangle and the axis or pivot on another corner, then one could find out from the third corner how far away the star was positioned. For estimating such distances, Trigonometry was created and later sufficient room was available in the ancient astrolabe that it could tell the correct time. Determining the direction of the Ka'bah was an equally complicated task. Similarly, spherical geometry was invented in order to determine the direction of the Ka'bah from distant regions and countries on the surface of this oval-shaped earth. In this field too success was achieved by knowing the positions of the stars through complicated numerical systems. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, Muslim astronomers were already capable of determining with the help of Trigonometry the direction of Ka'bah from various regions and cities. In this relation, Al Battani's name is prominent. For further details see David A. King, *In Synchrony with the Heavens: Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Medieval Islamic Civilization. 2 vols.* Leiden, 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> For example, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi introduced a delicate issue while mentioning the limitations of known mathematical calculations of the current mathematics in dividing inheritance. Suppose a person on his death-bed makes an agreement with his two servants that each one of them would be freed upon payment of 300 dirham. One of these two slaves dies and leaves a daughter and two sons and 400 dirhams worth inheritance. At the same time, his old

master also passes away and leaves three daughters and three sons behind him. The question was: how much will each of these children get as inheritance? Hence, in order to solve such issues, Al Khwarizmi invented the method of *Al Jabr wal Muqabilah* that guided the process of solving mind boggling issues.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Khwarizmi, *Al Jabr wal Muqabilah*, 1989, p.4

<sup>11</sup> Similar to other Muslim scientists, Al-Battani was also aware of this point that the study of astronomy and astrology was natural work for a Gnostic. Quoting from the verses of the Holy Qur'an he wrote in the foreword of his famous *Kitāb az-Zij*:

إن من أشرف العلوم منزلة وأسناها مرتبة وأحسنها حلية وأعلقها بالقلوب وألمعها بالنفوس وأشدها تحديدا للفكر والنظر وتركيبه للفهم ورياضة للعقل بعد العلم بما لا يسع الإنسان جهله من شرائع الدين وسنته علم صناعة النجوم لما في ذلك من جسيم الحظ و عظيم الانتفاع بمعرفة مدة السنين والشهور والمواقيت وفصول الأزمان و زيادة الليل والنهار ونقصانها ومواضع النبرين و كسوفها و مسير الكواكب في استقامتها و رجوعها و تبدل أشكالها و مراتب أفلاكها و سائر مناسباتها إلى ما يدرك بذلك من أنعم النظر وأدام الفكر فيه من اثبات التوحيد و معرفة كنه عظمة الخالق وسعة حكمته و جليل قدرته و لطيف صنعه قال عز من قائل (إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَكَيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ) و قال تبارك و تعالی (تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا) و قال عزوجل (هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسُ ضِيَاءً وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْأَجْسَابِ) و قال جل ذكره (وَالْقَمَرَ بِحُسْبَانٍ) مع اقتصاص كثير في كتاب الله عزوجل بطول وصفه و يتسع القول بذكره واستشهاده- (زيج البتاني، الباب الاول)

<sup>12</sup> In historical accounts, Naseer ud Din Tusi's scholarly greatness has been undermined by his political personality, due to the fall of Baghdad, especially, he was commonly known for his negative political activities, though in reality he had knowledge of both Holy Qur'an and the laws of nature. Not only did he write books on astronomy, his other publications such as *Raudhat al Tasleem*, *Sayr o Suluk*, *Ausaf al Ashraf*, and *Tajrid al 'Aitaqad* provide the evidence that he was also one of the most important Isma'ili scholars.

<sup>13</sup> The students of history are often baffled as to why Muslim historians have not chronicled Abdullah bin Zubair among the early rulers of Islam. For about nine and a half years, he ruled over a large part of the Muslim world including Hijaz. He also superseded Abdul Malik in piety and abstinence, and knowledge and virtues. Hence, the general impression that he was worthy of being a ruler was so strong that Abdul Malak had prohibited people from going on pilgrimage to Makkah due to the fear lest they should be influenced by talk of Ibn Zubair which would lead to his loss of power and that he might lose the area consisting of the cities of Syria. Once these extreme measures taken by Abdul Malik became unbearable and people complained about being hindered from going on pilgrimage, Abdul Malik introduced *Bait al Maqdis* as an alternative site of pilgrimage. Similarly, stories were invented such as that the Holy Prophet (SAW) had commanded the believers to make pilgrimage to three mosques and that if one stepped on the rock in the *Bait al Maqdis* where the Holy Prophet (SAW) started his journey of *Me'raj* (ascension) one could receive a merit equal to entering Ka'bah. Yaqubi wrote in his historical account that Abdul Malik constructed a beautiful dome on this rock and persuaded the people of Syria to circumambulate around the rock. It is reported that as a result of this persuasion, delegations from Syria started making pilgrimage to the Al Aqsa mosque. This practice became so



common that during the *Eid ul Adha* other than circumambulation visitors started the tradition of ritual sacrifice and shaving off of heads there. In addition, dazzling pictures depicting heaven, hell and the *Sirat*-bridge were painted on the inner part of the dome. Similarly, the people of Syria found an alternative site of pilgrimage equally meritorious as Ka'bah. If Abdul Malik had not soon acquired control over the sacred land of Hijaz, due to which an alternative site of pilgrimage was no longer required, this political move of the then ruler would have changed the current practice of the Hajj pilgrimage. For further details, see *Tareekh-e-Yaqubi*, vol. 2, page 161 and *Al Badaya wa al-Nihaya*, vol. 8, page 281.

<sup>14</sup> According to the current sources of history, until the rule of Abdul Malik (685-705) the registers of finances and taxes used to be compiled in Basra and Kufa in Persian language while the ones in Syria were written in Greek. In Persian Basra, a man called Zazan Farookh was responsible for finances though during that period a Christian man called Sarjoon bin Mansoor was appointed at the same post in Damascus.

<sup>15</sup> Balazuri, p.249.

<sup>16</sup> In the history books Khalid bin Yazid bin Mu'awiyya (c. 668–704) is mentioned as a scholar who had deep knowledge of the characteristics of various kinds of metal. On one occasion, he had advised Abdul Malik bin Marwan that he must get the *Surah Akhlas* (Chapter of the Holy Qur'an) engraved on the new coin. (See Abu Halal Al 'Askari, *Kitab al Awail*, Bairut, 1997, p.185.) It is commonly believed that Khalid bin Yazid's interest in chemistry derived from his interest in the mythical alchemy and that it was under his influence that many people in different historical eras were searching out a means of transforming cheap metals into gold through some mythical formulas. Nevertheless, Khalid's real interest in chemistry came from the need to produce a new standard coin and it was because of this he translated many current books written on the subject until finally he was able to help the Umayyad dynasty to establish a mint. It is reported that Khalid bin Yazid had prepared an explosive chemical compound called Nafeet which was far superior to the 'Greek fire' known to Romans.

<sup>17</sup> For example, if we consider the issue of estimation of lunar months. Ptolemy used the lunar eclipse for measuring the lunar months. According to this method, there is a distance of 1,26,007 days and one hour between two lunar eclipses. During this period, the moon completes its rotation 4,267 times. If we divide 1,26,007 days by 4,267, a lunar month will consist of 29 days, 31 minutes, 50 seconds, 8 *thalathi* and 20 *ruba'i*. This measurement of the lunar month (of 29,31,50,8,20) was actually discovered by Hajjaj bin Matar, though, according to Ptolemy, by dividing a 'day' by 'rotation' the result comes out quite different, as follows: (29,31,50,8,9,20). For reference, see: Bernard Goldstein, 'Ancient and Medieval Values for the Mean Synodic Month', *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 34 (2003): 65-74; George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of European Renaissance*, pp.79-80.

<sup>18</sup> It is commonly held that the work that Muslims undertook in the field of science and technology during their political supremacy was not originally their own rather all they did was in the first

two centuries of the Abbasid caliphate translate the Greek knowledge and sciences into Arabic as a result of which a stirring up took place in the Abbasid Baghdad. However, in later centuries when this knowledge was translated into Latin and transferred to the people of Europe, the Muslim civilization lost its splendor. According to this theory, Muslims had merely protected and drawn some practical benefit from the sciences invented by their Greek predecessors. It was Europe that undertook the advancement of science applying them to create a new world of exploration of the knowledge of the laws of the nature. Such views are supported either by those who have a complete lack of understanding of the history of human civilization or those who are prey to prejudice and propaganda.

First, the idea that before the translation movement of the Abbasids, sciences such as astronomy, geography, mathematics and fine arts did not exist either in the Arabian Peninsula or other conquered territories beyond has no truth in it. Such statements have also contributed to creating an image of the people of Makkah as illiterate, uneducated and ignorant. These statements intentionally depict Arabs or Muslims as incapable of acquiring knowledge and without signs of any kind of civilization. It may be possible that such exaggerated views have denigrated the image of Islam temporarily. However, such views and statements have no connection with historical facts. Anyone that frequently studies or recites the Holy Qur'an can easily understand that the earlier addressees of the Holy Qur'an derived motivation to understand its message. Besides, they had knowledge of the rotation of the sun and the moon and the calendrical system of months and years. Other than astronomy, they were given to occult practices such as geomancy, fortune telling, and soothsayer. More so, not only did they have knowledge of the counting from 1 till 100,000, they were also capable of understanding the complicated distribution of the shares of inheritance apparently guided by the inner meanings of the Qur'anic verse regarding inheritance.

The addressees of the Holy Qur'an had the basic capacity to understand it as well as the local conditions where such a great book of knowledge was revealed being suitable for implementing its message. Orientalists have made loud propaganda about the lack of intelligence among early Muslims and insisted especially during the era of decline on making us believe that we have been unable to prove our worth ever since. They seem to insist that just as we had benefited from the knowledge and the wisdom of the Greeks in the past we might also be rescued by the sciences and knowledge of the west in modern times. The majority of orientalist believe Muslim civilization was gleaned from the Greek knowledge and wisdom. Some borrow their ideas from the writings of Goldziher who considered all exploratory knowledge and discoveries of the Muslim era came from foreign sciences. For details, see: 'The Attitude of Orthodox Islam Towards the 'Ancient Sciences'' in Merlin L. Swartz, (ed). *Studies on Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp.185-215.

Rather than producing independent research, orientalist accepted this idea as final truth. This was the reason why the perception that Islam has been opposed to an investigative mind is

common in the west even today and perhaps for this reason there is little talk in today's Muslim world about the importance of contemplating the universe and searching for the knowledge of the secrets of the phenomenal world. Those who hold the orientalist view tirelessly preach the idea that while Greek knowledge and wisdom benefited the Islamic civilization, its advancement could not cross certain limits. However, when these sciences were transferred to Europe after being translated from Arabic into Latin, the west that had a passion for knowledge managed to create an entirely new world. On the one hand, such untruths are part of the political propaganda of western colonial rule. On the other hand, such ideas can be said to owe to extreme ignorance about history. The truth is that the movement of translation was not merely about translating Greek sciences; instead this three hundred year long scientific movement had encompassed all sciences and knowledge of the conquered areas from Byzantium to Persia. Moreover, science and knowledge from India and China were also under the dominance of Muslim knowledge. Not only had Muslims in that era played a prominent role in moving the human civilization forward in its journey of advancement, they had also established a hypothesis of research and analysis in the light of the Qur'anic worldview. Instead of accepting the current sciences in their existing form, they weighed and where necessary rejected the existing knowledge after thorough research and evaluation in the light of Qur'anic concepts and beliefs. However, whether they succeeded in this process is not the aim of our discussion here.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn al Haytham, *Al Shukuk 'ala Batalimos*. (Ed. by Abdul Hamid Sabra wa Nabeel Shahabi), Cairo, 1971.

<sup>20</sup> George Saliba gives information about this book with reference to the evidence found in an unpublished manuscript *Kitab al Haiya*. For reference, see: George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam*, New York University Press, 1994, p.20.

<sup>21</sup> Though a farfetched assumption and an absurd concept, *Al Mu'addil al Maseer* or the issue of Equant, as it is called in ancient astronomy, was an obstacle to the knowledge based on experiment and observation. The idea that a circle that slowly moves towards an orbit along with its path at a constant speed crosses its center without touching it seems quite absurd. George Saliba, *op cit.*, p.85.

<sup>22</sup> In the discussion about Aristotelian categories of accidents and substance<sup>1</sup> started by the disclaimers, time was also measured on the scale of substance where One God was believed to be the fountainhead of all the elements. Similarly, Al Razi presented the concept of Absolute Space which was much closer to Newton's ideas as compared to Aristotle's concept of space.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Haytham, *Al Shukuk 'ala Batalimos*, (Ed. by Abdul Hamid Sabra wa Nabeel Shihabi), Cairo, 1971, p.63.

<sup>24</sup> George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of European Renaissance*, London, 2007, pp.82-83.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn al-Haytham, *Al Shukuk 'ala Batalimos*, Cairo, 1971, p.38.

<sup>26</sup> In his monumental work *Kitab al Hayat*, Abu Ja'far Al Batroji (d.600) who is known in the west as Alpetragius, rejected the Ptolemaic model and presented a preliminary draft of a new astronomy. A Latin translation of this work was published in 1531 in Vienna and another book of his *Kitab al Haiy'ah* had been translated into Latin and was published by Michael Scott in Sicily during the rule of Frederick II in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Even Copernicus, whose views about his Muslim predecessors were quite conservative, disrespectful and dishonest, could not ignore al-Batroji altogether. In his famous book *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, Copernicus wrote: 'Alpetragius superiorem sole Venerem facit, et inferiorem Mercurium' i.e. al-Batroji believed that the place of Venus compared to Mercury was higher than the sun. This confession of Copernicus provides sufficient evidence that al-Batroji's concept of the universe was different from that of Plato and Ptolemy as the former had determined the place of both planets above the sun while the latter determined their place below the sun.

<sup>27</sup> In some contexts, the Holy Qur'an mentions the word *al-hikmah* (wisdom) separately while in other contexts it mentions the words *kitab* and *hikmah* (the book and the wisdom) together. For example, '...and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted wealth abundant...' (2:269) or '...and impart unto them revelation as well as wisdom...' (2:129). The Holy Qur'an states that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is obliged to teach the book and the wisdom (*kitab wa hikmah*). The word *kitab* denotes a designated document consisting of divine revelation where there is no room for suspicions or confusion. However, our predecessors have been prone to misunderstanding regarding fixing the meaning of *al-hikmah*. Some wrote that other than the Holy Qur'an, the word *hikmah* points to another alternative source. Hence, gradually the idea that the Holy Prophet received revelation of both *kitab* and *hikmah* gained recognition where the former was compiled in the form of the Holy Qur'an while the latter was written down in the form of the Sunnah and Hadith traditions. The role of Qatada al-Sudusi (d.118 h.), Ibn Wahhab (apprentice of Imam Malik) (d.179 h.) and Imam Shafei (d.205 h.) has been particularly important in making this view publicly accepted.

In our view, it is not correct to consider both *al-hikmah* and Sunnah to have an identical meaning since the Holy Qur'an provides the evidence that both *kitab* and *hikmah* were also granted to earlier prophets. For example, the references in the Holy Qur'an about Jesus Christ 'And he will impart unto him [thy son] revelation, and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel'. (3:48) or the progeny of Prophet Abraham '... But then, We did grant revelation and wisdom unto the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion' (4:54) or Luqman 'And indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman...' (31:12) support the view that it would not amount to a correct interpretation of the Holy Qur'an to consider *al-hikmah* to be the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad alone. It is not correct to consider *al-hikmah* and Sunnah to have the same essence since the collections of Hadith were certainly not revealed to Jesus Christ and Luqman.

Certain commentators found the solution for the division between *kitab* and *al-hikmah* that instead of searching for *al-hikmah* outside the Holy Qur'an, they indicated that *al-hikmah* was present in the Holy Qur'an itself. Undoubtedly, the Holy Qur'an calls itself *Hikmah Balighah* in one place. However, in various places in the Holy Qur'an *al-hikmah* has been mentioned as a suffix to the word *al-kitab* which means that *al-hikmah* is an essential aid for understanding the verses of this great divine book and for receiving guidance from it. What is *al-hikmah*? According to the Holy Qur'an, this is the phenomenon that aided and guided Prophet David in his rule and similarly Prophet Abraham received absolute authority when granted this gift of *al-kitab* and *al-hikmah* '...But then, We did grant revelation and wisdom unto the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion' (4:54). God ordains *al-hikmah* to whomsoever He wills 'Granting wisdom unto whom He wills...' (2:269) and whomsoever God ordains *al-hikmah* as if He granted them great wealth and benediction. One can easily comprehend from these statements that *al-hikmah* is a great benediction and blessing that enables nations and peoples to gain political dominance in the world. The grandeur and magnificence of Prophet David and Prophet Solomon were dependent on *al-hikmah* that God had ordained to them. The revelation received by the Holy Prophet succeeded in building an inner wisdom in his followers which subsequently led them to establish their rule over the world.

We can argue that during the early centuries of Islam, *al-hikmah* contributed to the formation of a kind of intellectual behavior that inspired early Muslims to explore the universe rather than seeing it as a mere spectacle or being frightened by its mysteriousness. Prophet David had created a state by virtue of his servanthood to God and by a form of reason that ruled the east and the west, mountains and birds. According to the Holy Qur'an, the mountains were subordinated to him in a way that they too joined him in praising the Lord and just as birds used to join him in praising and glorifying God. This was all possible due to '*...and bestowed upon him wisdom and sagacity in judgment*' (38:20). Astonishing practices ascribed to the empires of both David and Solomon such as climbing to mountain tops and mounting the winds, and ruling over birds and ants provide symbolic evidence that the divine revelation accompanied by *al-hikmah* not only makes it possible for human beings to conquer the universe it also inspires them to build heaven on earth; a heaven that is harmonized with the natural phenomena where the believers bow their heads as Luqman did in gratitude for the bounties from God Almighty and where David used to constantly turn to God in devotion in spite of have been granted all the blessings.

<sup>28</sup> Jabir bin Hayyan (referred in Fuat Sezgin, p.227)

<sup>29</sup> *Al Qanoon al Mas'udi*, vol.1, p.45

<sup>30</sup> It is a historical irony that as a result of the mighty movement that had started with the revelation of the Holy Qur'an inspiring the search for the knowledge of the laws of nature, that the experimental and observational scientific method was developed which today the west ascribes to Francis Bacon. Bacon published *Novam Organum* in the face of Aristotle's *Organon* and in this publication he declared experimentation and observation to be the foundation of all

sciences. Later this method of acquiring knowledge invented by Bacon was introduced as a scientific methodology. Hence, the world came to believe that the founding father of the modern world that was created as a result of experimental science was none other than Francis Bacon. To these discerning scholars, Bacon is also known as father of modern empiricism. Although those that have a slightest understanding of history would find it hard to deny that the modern scientific method of contemplation, where observations are considered more important than narrations, has been prevailing as a popular method among the Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages. For example, Ibn al Haytham who is equally respected in both east and west as the father of Optics, not only unveiled the mysteries of human experiment and observation he also constantly made men of knowledge aware that 'the truths are enveloped in doubts'. Ibn al Haytham's method is basically about confronting these doubts with experiment and observation:

... رأينا أن نصرف الاهتمام الى هذا المعنى بغاية الامكان ونخلص العناية به و نوقع الجد في البحث عن حقيقته ونستأنف النظر... في مبادئه و مقدماته و نبتدئ بالاستقراء الموجودات و تفصح أحوال المبصرات و تميز حواس الجزئيات و نلتقط باستقراء ما يخص البصر في حال الابصار وما هو مطرد لا يتغير و ظاهر لا يشتبه من كيفية الاحساس... ثم نترقى في البحث والمقاييس على التدرج والترتيب مع انتقاد المقدمات و التحفظ من الغلط في النتائج ونجعل غرضنا في جميع ما نستقره و نتصفحه استعمال العدل لا اتباع الهوى ونتحري في سائر ما نميزه و ننتقده طلب الحق لا الميل مع الاراء... فلعلنا ننتهى بهذا الطريق إلى الحق الذي به يثلج الصدر و نصل بالتدرج و التلطف الى الغاية التي عندها يقع اليقين و نظفر مع النقد والتحفظ باحليقة التي يزول معها الخلاف و تنحسم بها مواد الشبهات... وما نحن من جميع ذلك براء مما هو في طبيعة الإنسان من كدر البشرية ولكننا نجتهد بقدر مالنا من القوة الانسانية و من الله نستمد العون في جميع الأمور-

It does not end with Ibn al Haytham, or Jabir bin Hayyan's formula of balance, which we mentioned in the preceding pages, and his firm idea that 'ليس لاحد ان يدعى بالحق انه ليس في الغائب إلا مثل' (ما شاهد او في الماضي و المستقبل إلا مثل ما في الان in reality reflects empirical method that is based in the exploratory verses of the Holy Qur'an that made a new scientific method known to the followers of Muhammad (SAW). How can its adherents of the evade experimentation and observation while the divine book itself loudly proclaims to its followers that 'In time We shall make them fully understand Our messages [through what they perceive] in the utmost horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear unto them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth'. (41:53) and insists on using the sight correctly: '*...no fault will thou see in the creation of the Most Gracious. And thy vision [upon it once more: canst thou see any flaw? Yea, turn thy vision [upon it] again and yet again: [and every time] thy vision will fall back upon thee, dazzled and truly defeated....*' (67:3-4) It is hard to understand how the believers of Islam could turn their faces away from this scientific method despite the general call of the divine book to its followers in the following words: '*...but He has endowed you with hearing, and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful*' (16:78) and holds them accountable for empirical and observational qualities: '*...verily, [thy] hearing and sight and heart – all of them – will be called to account for it [on Judgment Day]!*' (17:36)? In fact, this new scientific method has overthrown the ancient methods of contemplation. In no time a new world of conquests and

discovery came into being. After the revelation of the Holy Qur'an human civilization could not retain its old pre-Islamic way of life.

<sup>31</sup> Jabir bin Hayyan, referred in Fuat Sezgin, p.227.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn al Haytham, *Ash Shukuk 'ala Batalimos*, op.cit. p.34.

<sup>33</sup> Observatories have always been considered in the Muslim world as symbols of the sciences. The Shammasiyya observatory of Baghdad, probably the first regular observatory, as well as others in Ray, Isfahan and Shiraz were established in the reign of Mamun. Other famous observatories in Maragha and Samarqand are considered outstanding for the research work accomplished therein, Samarqand Ulugh Beg, in particular. During the period of these observatories, while the world was yet uninformed about modern electronic instruments, the circumference of the earth was estimated to be 24,835 miles astonishingly close to the current measurement of 24,906 miles.

<sup>34</sup> The Egyptian scientist and historian Al Kindi was the first to state that while the sky appears to be blue this color arises from the mixture of the darkness of the sky with the light of dust and vapor atoms, and that the air is illuminated by the light of the sun. He writes: 'the atmosphere that covers the earth produces a dim light due to the fire molecules present on the earth that get scattered due to the heat that they have absorbed from the reflection of the rays from the earth. (Hence) the darkness above our heads appears to have the same colour due to the amalgamation of the light of the earth and the light of the stars between the darkness and brightness of the day and the blue colour is also due to the same reason' (Quoted in Fuat Sezgin, p.136).

<sup>35</sup> According to Al Kindi, 'when the sun is tilting towards the north, the regions of the north get warm and the regions of the south become cold. Consequently, the winds from the north expand due to their high temperatures and are directed towards the south as the winds in the south are shrunken due to their lower temperatures. This is the reason why most winds during the summer blow from the north and most winds during the winter blow from the south'. The question as to whether western explorers had gained their knowledge and understanding of Al Kindi's arguments awaits a proper balancing of Muslim-transmitted scientific knowledge and the origins of the Renaissance in the west. For further detailed discussion on this subject, see Sezgin, chapter5.

<sup>36</sup> For a long time in the West Tycho Brahe has been considered to be the inventor of Mural Quadrant, even though there is sufficient evidence available for that this instrument was invented by Al-Biruni who otherwise would not have mentioned that the circumference of the earth could be measured without wandering through the deserts. More, this instrument was commonly used in the observatory of Naseer ud Din Tusi. Till today this instrument kept in the observatory of Taqi ud Din in Istanbul is inviting us to rectify the historical equivocations. For further details, see: A.Y.Al-Hassan, (ed.), *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture*. Vol. 4: *Science and Technology in Islam*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, pp.235-265.

<sup>37</sup> Though Mamun's world map based on the Greek worldview divides the world into seven tracts, it is the first map of its kind that mentions 530 important cities of the world, five oceans, 290

rivers and 200 mountains and precious metals and stones available in various regions of the world. Al Mas'udi made a detailed discussion on the vastness and all-encompassing nature of this plan. See, *Kitab al-Tanbih wal Ashraaf*.

<sup>38</sup> Up to the times of Al-Biruni, there had been various think-tanks of the mathematical sciences. For example, during the period of the Abbasid Caliph Al Mansur (753-75) *Suriya Sidhant*, the Sanskrit manuscript on this subject was translated into Arabic. In addition, the Arabs had also knowledge of the ancient writings of Arya Bhat which not only discussed the rotation of the earth and the galaxies but also provided the knowledge that the parts of earth under water and above water were approximately equal. S. Maqbul Ahmad '*Djughrafiya*', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1991, vol.3, pp.575-587.

<sup>39</sup> See: Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni, *Kitab Tahdid Nihayat al Amakin Li Tashih Musafat al Masakin*, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> According to George Saliba, Ibn al Haytham's world famous book *Al Shukuk 'ala Batalimos* declaring the Ptolemaic system a mere hypothesis was probably never translated into Latin. Ibn al Haytham explains his arguments regarding the movement of the stars which he called the physical system in the following words: 'the first cases where the arrangement of the orbits of stars, and all other (celestial) bodies is based, are four. One, the physical body does not itself make a physical movement more than once. Second, there is no change in the movement of an uncompounded physical body i.e. during its rotation it always covers the same distance in the same time. Third, the body does not accept the celestial confusion; and four, the vacuum does not exist'. (Quoted in Fuat Sezgin, pp.102-103.)

<sup>41</sup> The book written by Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni (d.1048) where he criticizes Ptolemy is not only mentioned in the history books. With reference to *Abtaal al Buhtan Beradd al Burhan*, Qutub uddin Shirazi (d.1311) has reproduced this statement of Al-Biruni. Referred in George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories during the Golden Age of Islam*. New York University Press, 1994, p.279.

<sup>42</sup> Having rejected the Ptolemaic system around 150 years before Copernicus, Ibn Shatir (d.1375) had presented an alternative system now claimed as Copernican. If one casts an unprejudiced eye on the maps made by Copernicus and Ibn Shatir, it is not difficult to conclude that Copernicus' research is the copy of the scientific efforts made by Ibn Shatir and his predecessors. A comparison of Fig 1, 2 and 3 will confirm this point.

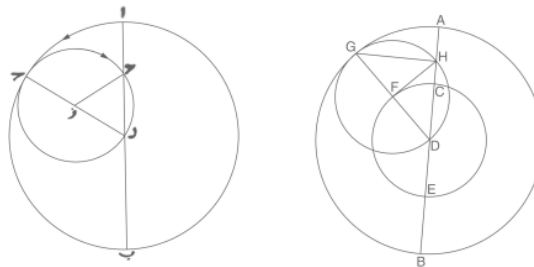


Figure 1



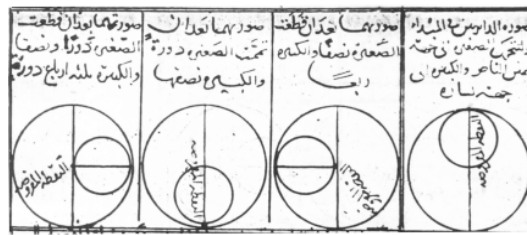


Figure 2

Figure 1 and 2 are taken from Naseer ud Din Tusi’s well-known work *Tadhkerah fi ‘Ilm al Haiyah* (1261) where the rotation of the planets has been explained through the Tusi-Couple. There are two circles in this map where the smaller circle’s diameter is half of the diameter of the bigger circle. The bigger diameter is shown as A, B and C. Here the smaller circle is thought to be moving clockwise whereas the bigger circle moves in the opposite direction (anti clockwise) with half a speed. Consequently, apparently despite its movement, point C is always seen between points A and B. In Figure 2, Tusi attempted to show what appears to an observer when the smaller circle moves within the bigger circle in the opposite direction with double speed. In the first part of the circle, when the small circle covers the upper half part of the bigger circle and the bigger circle moves anti clockwise and the smaller circle moves clockwise, this movement creates a fourth compartment. In reality here the smaller circle has completed its circle one-and-a-half time whereas the bigger circle has completed only three-fourths of its course. When one looks at this situation from a distance, it seems as if the smaller circle always rotates along the diameter of the bigger circle.



Figure 3

Comparing Tusi’s diagram with that of Nicolai Copernicus, it is not difficult to arrive at the following conclusions. First, Copernicus used Tusi-Couple in his diagram by translating the Arabic alphabet to the Roman alphabet and adding a European title. Second, the idea that Ptolemy’s model of the solar system does not present a true picture of the universe became current among some Muslim astronomers beginning with Ibn al Haytham (d.1040) who openly

critiqued it. Later Ibn Shatir (d.1375) altered it mathematically while still declaring the sun as the orbit rather than the earth; this Copernicus changed and introduced in the west. Due to the collective efforts of Copernicus and Galileo, the people of the west realized Ptolemy's system was overturned. This perception laid the foundation for fundamental intellectual change.

<sup>43</sup> In 1957, for the first time scholars discovered that around 150 or 200 years before Copernicus Ibn Shatir had made a new diagram on the basis of Tusi-Couple and that Copernicus had presented the same diagram with a slight alteration placing the sun instead of the earth at the center and thus acquired recognition in the west as the pioneer of this subject. Historical evidence proves that Ibn Shatir's book *Nihayat al Sul fi Tashih al Usul* had reached Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Some argue with certainty that Copernicus had studied this book and that it can be historically proven that this book was available in the library of Vatican and that Copernicus also visited the library. This is most likely the reason why there is such an astonishing similarity between the diagrams of Ibn Shatir and Copernicus. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see: George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories during the Golden Age of Islam*; George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of European Renaissance*, New York, 1994, p.236; George Saliba, (2007), Lecture at SOAS, London-Part 4/7 (<http://youtube.com/London, 2007. Watch?v=GfissgPCgfM>) and Lectures at SOAS, London-Part 5/7 (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=OVMBRAd6YBU>)

<sup>44</sup> For the first time, through the numeric rationale of the qualities of things, Jabir introduced a form of science which later caused an astonishing scientific revolution. Hence, it became possible for humans to discover the properties of various substances and create new ones by rearranging and ?? them. According to Jabir, who disclosed this principle of balance or *al-Meezan*, whoever has become aware of this possesses the basic secret of the universe. (Quoted in Fuat Sezgin, p.77).

<sup>45</sup> During the Middle Ages, the Muslim world was known to be a superior civilization to Europe's and Muslims took pride in exporting their scholarly and literary talents to the world. Western scholars looked up to the Muslim world awe-stricken just as the third world nations look up to the western countries today. It was a general trend in the world to follow the scholarly debates in the Muslim world. In this context, it would not be surprising if Jabir bin Hayyan's frequent image of a cosmos became the bases of Faust writings and the creation of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Fuat Sezgin, *Tarikh-e-Ulum mein Tahzib-e-Islami ka Maqam*, p.45.

<sup>47</sup> It is reported that until about 300 years later, when Robert of Chester translated some parts of this book into Latin and published it with the title *Liber Algebrae et Almucabola*, the people of Europe had been totally uninformed about this science.

<sup>48</sup> See for reference: Abul Hassan Ahmad bin Ibrahim al-Aqlidsi, *Al Fusul fil Hisab al Hindi*, Amman, 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Fuat Sezgin, *op cit*. p.89.

- <sup>50</sup> Al-Kashi was one of the illustrious scientists of his times invited by Ulugh Beg (d.1449) to Samarqand to undertake high-level research. Al-Kashi discovered the proportion of 6.283185307955865 between the radius and circumference of the circle which holds credibility to this day. For further details, see: Berggren. J.L. *Episodes in the Mathematics of Medieval Islam*. New York, 1986, pp.15-21, pp.151-154.
- <sup>51</sup> In Muslim societies, equality notionally arises from the ideal mutual brotherhood shared between rich and the poor, in which king and beggar share food. The idea that contagious diseases that are transferable from one person to another appeared to some of our fiqhi scholars against the very doctrine of Islamic egalitarianism. To clear the air, Lisan ud Din Khatib (d.776 h.) in his book *Maqna't al-Sail 'anil Mardh al-Hayil* had to write: 'Hence if we say why we must accept the claim about contagiousness whereas the shariah refutes it, we would say that contagions are proven through inductive experiment, senses, observation, and continuous information and the above argument is based on such sources. Whoever ponders this issue or has acquired understanding about it also finds out quickly that getting in contact with a person suffering from a contagious disease often kills and who does not have contact with them is saved. Similarly, due to coming in contact with a piece of cloth or a utensil that such a person has touched or used, the disease is spread in the entire household or even the locality, so much so that if a person happens to wear an earring that the person with a contagious disease had used gets killed. Such a disease in a person that catches a contagious disease is transferred to those in the locality that meet him and gradually it spreads in the entire neighbourhood. (Quoted in Fuat Sezgin, p.47).
- <sup>52</sup> Congratulating Galen in his book *Shukuk*, Razi wrote that he regretted criticizing a person from whose vast knowledge he had greatly benefited. Nevertheless, his feelings of gratefulness could not stop him from pointing out his errors.
- <sup>53</sup> Fuat Sezgin, op. cit. p.45.
- <sup>54</sup> op. cit. p.46.
- <sup>55</sup> op.cit
- <sup>56</sup> op.cit.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.51.
- <sup>58</sup> Ehsan Masood, *Science and Islam: A History*, London: 2009. p.162.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.74.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.76.
- <sup>61</sup> For example, Theodor Abu Qura (d.826) who was a Christian scholar and who was appointed to execute some official matters during the Umayyad dynasty was quite famous as a translator. Thabit bin Qura (d.901) who translated books related to mathematics and engineering into Arabic was an apostate. Hunain bin Ishaq who was appointed to supervise the most important translation works was Christian.
- <sup>62</sup> Some orientalists, one of the most notable being Ernest Renan, create the impression that Muslim societies do not provide suitable environment for scientific development. They claim that despite

having access to the Greek sciences, Muslims could not advance further due to the opposition from Muslim scholars. They also argue that when the same scientific knowledge was transferred from Muslims to the Europeans, the latter created an enthusiastic scientific revolution which altogether changed the lifestyle in European societies. For one, such kinds of claims are based on a complete lack of knowledge of the history. Secondly, these are created by a type of culture that associated the scientific development of the Middle Ages with the dark ages only because these developments were taking place outside the boundaries of the west. This entire propaganda was created at the time when due to the command of neo-colonialism Muslims that were compelled to fight for their survival could not sort out such a-historical accounts. Consequently, the propaganda continued to gain momentum and today such nonsense talks and prejudiced opinions are seen as authentic historical statements. If we look carefully, it is Goldziher who took this propaganda to new height in his German thesis titled 'Stellung der alten islamischen Orthodoxie zu den antiken Wissenschaften' (Goldziher 1915). His so-called scholarly work *Muhammedanische Studien* (1888) that basically studies Islam as a 'finished phenomenon', has been leading both modernists and orientalist astray.

<sup>63</sup> Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book* (trans. Geoffrey French) Princeton University Press, 1984, pp.116-117.

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.* p.123.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.128.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (ed.). *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp.11-12.

<sup>68</sup> *The Arabic Book*, *op. cit.* p.62.

<sup>69</sup> We do not know with certainty about where the art of setting up various paper factories in Baghdad originated from during the early days of the Abbasid period. The mention of *raqqin-manshur* ('...wide open scrolls') in the Holy Qur'an (52:3) indicates that an early form of paper was already present during the early days of Islam which was used by the Arab poets for hanging the specimens of their poetry and where business trade matters and mutual agreements were also written down. Whether it was the Hudaibiya agreement or the document of the Medina contract, or letters by the Holy Prophet that were written to various rulers and chieftains of tribes, or most of all the manuscript of the Holy Qur'an itself that was placed as the principal book near the imam's pulpit in the Holy Prophet's mosque, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the first generation of Muslims were equipped with the basic instruments of writing and reading. However, the paper industry with abundance of stationary items was aimed at a popular market was created during the Abbasid period. It is reported that the Arabs learned the technology of paper making from the Chinese during the eighth century and by the end of that century they had perfected their expertise to the extent that Baghdad's paper mills were known all over the world for their fine paper and some people started calling this paper Bagdatixon. See Jonathan

Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*, Yale University Press, 2001, pp.48-51.

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle who considered the knowledge to be fundamentally limited to three main branches of Physics, Metaphysics and Mathematics, used to be an attractive source of guidance for Muslim scholars of the early centuries of Islam. Aristotle held the view that merely the sense perception and consciousness could not unveil the reality of knowledge. Hence in order to create a correct perception about the universe, we would have to resort to ecstasy as an important element beside senses and consciousness. The ancient Greek mind was convinced that the universe had existed since eternity and was created by a being that has been immersed in a state of self-contemplation since eternity. In other words, Aristotle's god was quite different from the God of the Holy Qur'an. The statement that the universe was as old as God Himself was a clear sign of partnership to God. Muslim scholars and thinkers could not agree to this concept of the universe. These interferences by the Greek wisdom on the one hand created the possibilities of intellectual equivocations while on the other hand these foreign intellectual interferences provided the young Muslim Mind impetus for an unbridled research and analysis. For Muslims the Qur'anic image of God was an important religious and faith issue. Hence despite all philosophical hairsplitting, they could not accept the concept of a universe that was ancient and eternal. However, there was one advantage of the revocation of Aristotle's divine system that there were suspicions about the validity of his writings. For this reason in future instead of considering knowledge to be limited to three above branches it were considered to have unlimited possibilities and Muslim scholars and skilled persons laid the foundation of exploratory sciences in countless branches in the 'aqliya aur naqliya' (scientific and revealed knowledge). If books such as *Kitab al-Taharat*, *Kitab al-Zakat*, *Kitab al-M'uamilah*, *Kitab al-Bay'* and *Kitab al-Wiratha* were known as fields of specialization, in the natural sciences written works such as *Kitab al-Manazir*, *Kitab al-Tahdid Nihayat al-Amakin*, *Kitab al-Hindsah* and *Kitab al-Nujum* became examples of unlimited vastness of the sciences.

<sup>71</sup> Though al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Seena, and Ibn Rushd to a great extent reinforced and preached the Aristotelian pattern of thought, the Qur'anic worldview was so effective that Aristotle's greatness became an ongoing subject of research and analysis in all eras. If he had been accepted as a final authority on knowledge, the Islamic civilization would have been reduced as a replica of the Greek civilization. In that case the Islamic civilization's process of advancement would not have continued.

<sup>72</sup> During the period of Mamun, the Greek wisdom achieved such authenticity that it was considered a companion of the Islamic thought so much so that the Greek wise men also had a voice in the insight of the shariah and the gnosis of the *Tawhid*. It is reported that one night in his dream Mamun saw Aristotle seated on a throne. Mamun asked this saintly man what is the reality of goodness. Aristotle said: the thing that suits the intellect. Mamun asked again and what it is in the second place. Aristotle replied: whatever may be good according to the shariah. And

what is the third place? He responded: what is good according to the people. Then again he asked what the next place was. Aristotle replied: there was no next place. On this occasion, Mamun requested Aristotle to give him some advice. He replied: keep sticking to the *Tawhid*. It is said that perhaps it was the effect of this dream that Mamun made it a mission of his life to translate the works of the Greek scholars and perhaps also because for Mamun there was no ideological conflict between the Greek wisdom and the divine revelation. According to Ibn al-Nadeem:

فكان هذا (المنام) من اوكد الاسباب في اخراج الكتب فان المامون كان بينه و بين الملك الروم مراسلات وقد استظهر عليه المامون فكتب الى ملك الروم يسأله الاذن في انفاذ ما عنده من مختار من العلوم القديمة المحزونة المدخرة ببلاد الروم فاجاب الى ذلك بعد امتناع فاخرج المامون لذلك جماعة... فاخذوا هما وجدوا ما اختاروا فلما حملوا اليه امرهم بنقله فنقل - (الفهرست، ص ١٣٩)

<sup>73</sup> Toby Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, Cambridge University Press, 1993